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ETCHED

THE WORKS OF

THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

IN TWENTY-FOUR VOLUMES

LIMITED TO ONE THOUSAND
REGISTERED SETS, OF WHICH
THIS IS NUMBER 252

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"*By Hercules, my lovely Queen, though I travelled fast, I see I have come too late,*" *said Marc Antony.*— Page 284.

THE WORKS OF

THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

VOLUME EIGHT

TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY
PROFESSOR F. C. DE SUMICHRAST
Department of French, Harvard University

FORTUNIO

ONE OF CLEOPATRA'S NIGHTS
KING CANDAULES

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR

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"By Hercules, my lovely Queen, though I travelled fast, I see I have come too late," said Marc Antony . . . . *Frontispiece*

Cleopatra, leaning on the arm of Charmian, passed rapidly like a dazzling vision between the double line of slaves bearing torches . . . . . *Page* 246

Introduction

FORTUNIO

Introduction

HERE is a characteristically Romanticist work, or rather three works, the first of which is boldly, almost offensively intended as a demonstration of the Romanticist theories of art and manners. *Fortunio* was advertised, on its first appearance, as an "Incredible Tale." Was this meant as a concession to the common-sense and the artistic feeling of the readers of the book? By no means. The accurate epithet was intended rather to pique public curiosity, then whetted to the utmost by the extravagances of the Romanticist writers. The motive which inspired Gautier in the composition of this work, which even now enjoys considerable popularity in France, was the desire to indulge to the full his fervid imagination, and at the same time to make another pronouncement in favour of his peculiar views on art, peculiar in this that they ran counter to the sober understanding of many able minds of the day and

especially to the notions, imperfect and commonplace, no doubt, of the mass of the readers of newspapers and light literature. These views, however, were not peculiar to Gautier in so far as he was a member of the Romanticist school, and an important one at that. All the young authors who had rallied round Victor Hugo, recognised for some years past as the standard-bearer of Romanticism, shared the opinions of Gautier on the question of "Art for art's sake," and the consequent necessity for shocking, as frequently and as violently as possible, the sense of decency that in spite of repeated attacks, still survived among the general public.

The greatest and most celebrated authors of the school, save Lamartine and Alfred de Vigny, had adopted the courtesan, of the worst and most contemptible type, as the natural heroine of their lucubrations. The chief in person, the monumental, cathedral, pyramidal Hugo, had devoted infinite pains to the rehabilitation of the abandoned female. His *Marion de Lorme* is too well known in this respect to render more than a passing allusion to it necessary. Alexandre Dumas had taken the woman in society and adorned her adultery with all the flashy colours and fine

writing at his disposal. Petrus Borel, the lycanthrope, wrote novels at once unintelligible and vile; the whole band of hangers-on to the chief imitated the example set by him, and sang the praises of the fallen woman in the finest language they could command. It seemed as if French society were composed exclusively of young debauchees, old voluptuaries, and women, young and old, rotten to the marrow. The protests of the more respectable readers and artists were treated with contumely, hooted down, characterised as British cant and puritanical hypocrisy, and declared to spring from an impossibility on the part of the protestants to understand art or anything connected with it.

Gautier, who never swerved from the application of the doctrine, could not possibly remain behind in the race, so his *Fortunio*, and, in a less degree, his *Cleopatra* and *Candaules*, were intended as a declaration of principles, though he had already stated these principles with sufficient clearness and vigour in his *Mademoiselle de Maupin* and its startling "Preface." *Fortunio* is in every respect inferior to that celebrated novel, and although Gautier declared that the "Incredible Tale," like the novel, was intended to be and actually was an exposition of Beauty in the highest and purest form, no

comparison is possible between the genuine feeling for beauty, albeit too often enveloped in sensuality, which is the characteristic trait of *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, and the merely sensual and gross, nay, usually coarse and repellent *Fortunio*. The absurdities and extravagances which abound in this tale, and which recall the similar but more talented performances of the senior Dumas in the same line, lack everything that in the works of the latter attracts and retains the reader. The adventures of the hero in Gautier's absurdity are merely idiotically impossible. The adventures of Monte-Christo are improbable, assuredly, but not wholly wild and devoid of a shade of possibility. Besides, there is dramatic force and effect in all of Dumas' work, and there is absolutely none in *Fortunio*. It is so painfully plain that the author desires to startle, shock, and irritate decency and common-sense, that he ends by failing in his purpose. He actually wearies one, though it must be owned that this is truer of the foreign reader and of the more refined French public than of the mass of devourers of light literature, *Fortunio*, as has been stated, being still one of the most popular of Gautier's books, and even very modern critics still expressing admiration for it.

Most of the performances of Fortunio are childishly ridiculous, where they are not low and disgusting. The description of the orgy with which the book begins, and in which Gautier evidently revels, may have pleased the Romanticists of his day, but it is merely sickening now. Neither art nor beauty in any form redeems this passage from wearisomeness. Nay, more: it is Gautier's evident intention to amaze his reader by a description of the most splendid luxury and to impress on the contemned *bourgeois* the fact that a Romanticist is intimately acquainted with all the details of the most refined wealth and taste. He simply succeeds in proving that he, like Hugo, his master and exemplar, is one of the most thorough-paced *bourgeois* that ever gaped in amazement and surprise at scenes that offer, in reality, neither real splendour nor real artistic interest.

Next to this motive — the stupefying of the average reader and the insistent proclamation of the doctrine of "Art for art's sake," — the most striking feature of the work is the additional proof it affords of the contempt of the Romanticists for woman. They looked upon her as merely a plaything destined to satisfy the carnal lusts of their heroes — and possibly

themselves — or to play the part of an ornament in a room or at a feast, exactly like the vases and golden cups they are so fond of piling on tables and side-boards. In most of the Romanticist dramas and novels — with the exception, already noted, of Lamartine and Vigny — the part played by woman is that assigned to her in the East: that of ministering to the sensual satisfaction of man. In the whole range of that form of the literature of France, there are but few examples of female characters treated sympathetically and reverently. The wretched beings upon whom Gautier lavishes all the skill of an artist, are wholly contemptible, and not even his assertion, borrowed from Hugo, that the love Musidora feels for Fortunio suffices to wash away all her sins and to transform her into a pure and honourable woman, not all his casuistry can reconcile the reader to the acceptance of that character as that of a woman, any more than Hugo's magic verse accomplishes the same purpose in his *Marion de Lorme*. The tale is deliberately meant to be astonishingly immoral and improper, and yet it utterly fails of its purpose. It is simply absurd. The reader feels that there is beauty in the words, in occasional suggestions, but as for admiring the characters or being in the slightest degree

influenced to evil by the pranks of the extremely inane Fortunio, he knows himself entirely safe from any such temptation.

The other two tales, *One of Cleopatra's Nights* and *King Candaules*, are both infinitely superior to *Fortunio*. In both, Gautier has sought a sensual subject in order to apply once more his doctrine of Art, but in these two cases, and especially in the latter, genuine feeling for beauty and for the dramatic have swamped the merely gross side of the subject. The exotic has helped Gautier; an archeologist might find reason to differ with him and to criticise some of the details, but the general effect of the two tales is distinctly strong and interesting. There is a story — there is practically none in *Fortunio*; there is a drama, and a bloody one, quite in keeping with the manners of the times described; there are force and power, both of which are lacking in the other work; there is consistency in the characters of Cleopatra and of Nyssia. Indeed, in the latter there is a glimpse of a higher ideal of woman; of a woman to whom chastity and self-respect mean something, and who is the more attractive on that account. There is some analysis of sentiments and motives; not very deep, no doubt, but more

than one meets with usually in the works of Romanticist writers.

Gautier's love of plastic beauty, his fondness for spectacular pomp, his enjoyment of the vast, the mighty, the huge, the colossal, his passionate love of colour in its most dazzling as well as in its most delicate manifestations, combine in these two tales to enchant and delight the reader. Here is no mere balderdash, no absurd attempt to amaze the *profanum vulgus*, whom he hates so cordially, but an artistic and dramatic representation of scenes from long vanished civilisations, from realms of tradition and legend, in which the imagination may freely indulge in its wildest flights, and yet is more under control because the desire to be archeologically accurate and to prove that a Romanticist can be reliably erudite checks the excesses in which Gautier has previously revelled.

Fortunio was published serially in *le Figaro*, from May 23 to July 24, 1837. It then bore the title *l'Eldorado*, and the name was changed only on the publication in book form in 1838. Another edition appeared in 1840, and in 1845 it was included in the *Nouvelles*, of which it has ever since formed part. *One of Cleopatra's Nights* was written for *la Presse*,

in which it was published in instalments from November 29 to December 6, 1838. It is not probable that the subject was suggested to Gautier by the *Ruy Blas* of Victor Hugo, though the general drift is similar, and Gautier no doubt had talked *Ruy Blas* over with his great chief. In the original draft of the tale, Gautier introduced a verse from Hugo's drama, which he excised later when the story was included in the *Nouvelles*. As for *King Candaules*, it is later in date, appearing in *la Presse* from October 1 to 5 in the year 1844, and being subsequently included in the same volume as the other two tales here given. It is enthusiastically lauded by Victor Hugo in a letter to the author, dated October 4, 1844, and reproduced by the Vicomte de Spoelberch de Lovenjoul in his admirable *Histoire des œuvres de Théophile Gautier*, to which the editor is indebted for the bibliographical details of Gautier's works.

Fortunio

FORTUNIO

I

GEORGE was entertaining his friends at supper. Not all of them, for they numbered two or three thousand, but a few of the lions and tigers of his private menagerie.

His suppers were so famous for their brilliancy, elegance, and delicate sensuality, that it was considered a piece of luck to be invited to them; but it was difficult to obtain the favour, and few could boast of having their names habitually inscribed on the list of fortunate ones. A man had to be a very high liver indeed, tried by fire and water, before he could be admitted into the sanctuary.

As for the women, the conditions were still harder, —the most perfect beauty, the most refined corruption, and not more than twenty years of age. Hence it will be readily supposed that there were not many women at George's supper, although the second condition is apparently easy enough to fulfil. There were four

that evening, four superb, thorough-bred creatures, half angels, half devils, with hearts of steel in breasts of marble, miniature Cleopatras and Imperias, the most delightful monsters imaginable.

Although there was every possible reason why the supper should be exceedingly gay, it was, on the contrary, rather dull. Pleasant fellows, excellent cookery, very old wines, very young women, candles enough to deaden the noonday light, — all the elements which usually go to make up human enjoyment were combined in proportions rarely met with, yet a shadow of dulness had fallen upon every brow; George himself found it difficult to conceal a feeling of disappointment and annoyance which his guests seemed to share.

The party had sat down to table on leaving the Bouffes, that is, at about midnight. A magnificent clock by Boulle, placed upon a pedestal inlaid with tortoise-shell, was about to strike one o'clock, and yet the guests had only just taken their seats. An empty chair denoted that some one had failed to come, and so the supper had begun with the unpleasant sensation of disappointed expectation, and dishes which were no longer at their best; for it is with cookery as with love, there is a moment that never recurs, and

which it is extremely difficult to seize upon. The absentee must unquestionably have been very highly thought of by the company, for George, who was a gourmand after the manner of Apicius, would not have waited fifteen minutes for a couple of princes.

Musidora, the most piquant of the four deities, uttered a soft sigh like the cooing of a sick dove, which meant, "I am going to spend a gloomy evening and to be horribly bored. The party has started wrong, and these young fellows look like undertakers."

"Heaven blast me!" said George, breaking between his fingers a very costly Venetian glass, bell-shaped on a spiral stem rayed with milky lines. The broken glass scattered over the cloth, in lieu of dew, a few drops of old Rhine wine more precious than Orient pearls; "it is one o'clock and that confounded Fortunio is not here!"

The handsome girl was seated by the empty place intended for Fortunio, so was completely alone on that side. The seat had been reserved for Fortunio as a place of honour, for Musidora belonged to the highest ranks of the aristocracy of beauty, and she certainly lacked only a sceptre to be a queen. Possibly she might have obtained it in a poetic age, or in those fabulous

days when kings married shepherdesses. It is not quite certain, either, that Musidora would have accepted a constitutional monarch. She appeared not to be enjoying herself; she had even yawned once or twice quite openly. She cared for no one among the guests, and her self-love not being interested, she remained cold and gloomy as if she had been alone.

Until Fortunio turns up, let us cast a glance over the room and the guests. The room itself has a rich and splendid air. The walls are wainscotted in oak set off by dull gold arabesques. A richly carved cornice, supported by children and monsters, runs around the room. The ceiling is formed of cross beams covered with ornaments and carvings, and upon the golden background of the compartments have been painted female faces in the Gothic taste, but with more freedom and grace of manner. Between the windows are placed sideboards and tables in antique breccia supported by silver dolphins with gilded eyes and fins, whose twisted tails form capricious volutes. The sideboards are laden with silver plate engraved with coats of arms, and flagons of strange shapes holding curious liqueurs. Full, thick curtains of orange-red velvet hang before the stained-glass windows, which are pro-

vided with triple shutters to prevent any noise from outside being heard within, or from within being heard outside. A great mantelpiece of carved wood fills up the end of the room. Two caryatids with jutting breasts and swelling hips, their long hair falling in waves, two living figures worthy of Jean Goujon or Germain Pilon, support on their shoulders a transverse shelf delicately carved and covered with foliage, the finish of which is admirable. Above, a bevelled Venetian mirror, very narrow and placed horizontally, sparkles within a magnificent frame. A perfect forest is flaming within the vast chimney, lined with white marble, with two great bronze dragons, their wings provided with claws, for andirons. Three chandeliers of rock crystal covered with wax tapers hang from the ceiling like bunches of a miraculous vine. Twelve candelabra in gilt bronze, in the form of slaves' arms, spring from the wainscotting, each holding in its fist a bouquet of strange flowers whence white tapers issue like lighted pistils; to cap this splendour, and by way of ornaments above the doors, four fabulously beautiful Titians with all their glow of passion, all their wealth of warm golden colour, Venuses and mistresses of princes, proudly enthroned in their divine

nudity in the red shadow of curtains, smiling with the self-satisfaction of women who are sure of being eternally beautiful.

Count George prized these paintings highly, and he would have given away twenty-five dining-rooms such as the one I have just described rather than one of his pictures. In poverty, if poverty could have come to him, he would have pawned his father's portrait and his mother's ring, before consenting to sell his beloved Titians. It was the one thing which he possessed of which he was proud.

In the centre of this great room, imagine a large table covered with a damask tablecloth with Count George's coat of arms woven in, with the coronet and motto of his house. A chased centre-piece, representing tiger and crocodile hunts with Indians riding on elephants, plates of Japan or old Sèvres china, glasses of all shapes, silver-gilt knives, and all that is necessary for drinking and eating delicately and long. Around the table four lost angels, Musidora, Arabella, Phœbe, and Cynthia, charming girls, trained in fatherly fashion by the great George himself and surnamed *incomparable*. Between them six young men, not one of whom was old, contrary to custom, and whose smooth

and restful faces expressed the indolent security and the patrician self-possession of people who are the happy possessors of two or three hundred thousand a year and the greatest names in France.

George, as master of the house, is lying back in a great arm-chair of Cordova leather, the others are on smaller chairs of the shape now called Mazarin, made of ebony and upholstered with cherry and white silk damask of exquisite rarity.

The company is served by little naked negroes with plum-coloured trunk hose, necklaces of glass beads and golden armlets and anklets such as are seen in the paintings of Paolo Veronese. These little negroes move around the table with monkey-like agility and help the guests to the costliest wines of France, Hungary, Spain, and Italy, contained, not in ignoble bottles, but in beautiful Florentine vases of silver-gilt admirably chased; yet, in spite of their quickness, they scarcely manage to serve every one rapidly enough.

Over all this regal elegance and luxury, over the crystals, bronzes, gilding, a flood of light so brilliant that the least detail is illumined and flames strangely; a torrent of silver light which leaves no place in shadow save underneath the table, a dazzling atmosphere rayed

by iris and prismatic beams which might dull less glorious eyes and diamonds than those of the incomparable Musidora, Arabella, Phœbe, and Cynthia.

On George's right, next to Fortunio's empty chair, is seated Musidora, the beauty with the sea-green eyes. She is at most eighteen years of age. Never has imagination dreamed of a more suave and chaste ideal. She might be mistaken for a living vignette from Thomas Moore's "Loves of the Angels," so limpid and diaphanous is she, and she appears rather to illumine than to be illumined herself. Her hair, so fair that it melts into the transparent tones of her skin, falls upon her shoulders in lustrous curls. A simple band of pearls, something between a frontlet and a tiara, keeps the two golden waves which fall on either side of her brow from scattering and meeting. Her hair is so fine and silky that the least breath lifts it and makes it wave. A dress of a very pale green colour figured with silver sets off the ideal whiteness of her bosom and her bare arms, round which twist two bracelets in the form of emerald serpents with diamond eyes, painfully realistic. These form her sole ornaments. Her pale face, which exhibits inexpressible youth in its heyday, is of the highest type of English

beauty. A light down, like the bloom of a fruit, softens its delicate contours, and the flesh is so delicate that the light penetrates and illumines it within. That divinely pale oval face, with the two masses of fair hair, the eyes moist with vaporous languor, and the child-like mouth with its moist lustre, has an air of modest melancholy and plaintive resignation very remarkable on such an occasion. To look at Musidora, one would think she was a statue of Modesty placed by chance in a house of ill-fame.

But with a little care one notes certain less angelic glances, and at the corner of the tender rosy mouth shows now and then the tip of the serpent's tongue; yellow gleams irradiate the limpid eyes like golden veins in antique marble, and impart to the glance a soft cruelty characteristic of the courtesan and the kitten. At times the brows are feverishly agitated by deep, repressed ardour, and the eyes are filled with moist light as if a tear spread without overflowing.

The lovely girl sits with one arm hanging down, the other outstretched on the table, her lips half-parted, her full glass before her, her glance wandering around. She is borne down by that immeasurable weariness known to those only who have very early gone to

excess in everything, and as far as Musidora is concerned, there is no novelty left save in virtue.

"Come, Musidora," said George, "you are not drinking." And taking the glass which she had not yet touched, he put it to her lips, and pressing it against her teeth, he poured the liquor drop by drop into her mouth. Musidora allowed him to do so with the utmost indifference.

"Do not torment her, George," said Phœbe, half rising; "when she is in one of her sad fits you cannot get a word out of her."

"By Jove!" replied George, putting down the glass; "If she will neither drink nor speak, I shall kiss her, so that she shall not be wholly unsociable."

Musidora turned her head away so quickly that George's lips merely touched her earring.

"Oh," said George, "Musidora is becoming monstrously virtuous. Soon she will allow no one to kiss her but her lover, — and yet I had taught her the very best of principles. Musidora virtuous and Fortunio absent! that makes a pretty poor supper."

Since the much wished-for Fortunio has not yet arrived, and I cannot begin my story without him, I shall ask the reader's permission to sketch the portraits

of Musidora's companions, much in the way in which one hands a book of engravings or of sketches to a person who has to wait. Fortunio, who shall, if you please, be the hero of this tale, is a young man usually very punctual, and some important reason must have delayed him and kept him at home.

Phœbe resembles Apollo's sister, save as regards chastity, and that is why she has assumed the name, which strikes her as both a madrigal and a piece of irony. She is of tall, willowy stature, and in her port has something of the warlike pride of the huntress of antiquity. Her delicate nose, with its rosy, sensual nostrils runs into her brow almost without a change. Her long, slender eyebrows, her narrow eyelids, her round, well-shaped mouth, her slightly curved chin make her closely resemble a Greek medal. She wears a costume piquant in its originality: a dress of silver brocade cut in the shape of a tunic and held on the shoulders by large cameos, silk stockings of the utmost fineness flushed with the rosiness of the flesh, and shoes of white satin, which with their crossed ties closely imitate cothurns. A crescent of diamonds fixed in her hair as black as night and a necklace of stars complete her costume.

Phœbe is Musidora's dearest friend, or rather her dearest foe.

Cynthia, enthroned at one end of the table between two handsome young fellows, one of whom is her ex-lover and the other her coming lover, is a regular, serious Roman beauty. She has nothing of the sprightly grace and the ever evident coquetry of Parisian women. She is beautiful, she knows it, and rests tranquil in the consciousness of her all-powerful charms, like a warrior who has never been defeated. She breathes slowly and regularly, much like a sleeping child; her gestures are simple and quiet, her movements few and rhythmical. At this moment she is leaning her chin upon the back of her wondrously shapely white hand, her little finger capriciously turned up, and the turn of her wrist and the pose of her arm recalling the fine, mannered poses admired in the paintings of the old masters. The black hair with blue reflections, separated in simple bandeaux, shows the little white ears which have never been pierced and stand out a little from the head like those of Greek statues. Warm brown tones soften the transition between the deep black of her hair and the rich pallor of her brow. Some light hairs on the temples diminish the stiffness of her clearly

arched brows, and golden tones which increase in intensity as they ascend towards the back of the neck, gild it harmoniously and show off richly in the supple, firm flesh the three lovely folds of Venus' necklace. Her firm, mat shoulders look like the marble which Canova washed with water saturated with oxide of iron to soften its dazzling crudity and to remove the shine of the polish. Cleomenes' chisel never produced anything more perfect, and the most exquisite contours caressed by art are as nothing by the side of this magnificent reality.

When she wants to look to one side, she does so without turning her head, by turning her eyes alone, so that the blue crystal, brightened by a broader glance, is illumined with unctuous brilliancy indescribable in its effect. Then, when she has seen, she brings her dark eyes slowly back to their place, without interfering with the immobility of her marble mask.

In the pride of her beauty, Cynthia rejects all dress as an unworthy artifice. She has but two gowns, one of black velvet, the other of white watered silk. She never wears collars or earrings, not even a finger-ring. What ring, what collar, could possibly be worth as much as the spot they would cover. One day she

replied with Cornelian pride to a woman who had asked to see her dresses and gems, and who, astonished at this excessive simplicity, inquired how she dressed on gala days and ceremonies: "I take off my gown and take out my comb."

That evening she was in demi-toilette, wearing her black velvet dress next to the skin without a chemise or a corset.

As for Arabella, I scarce know what to say of her, save that she was a charming woman. Supreme gracefulness marked her every motion. Her gestures were so soft, so harmonious, that they were rhythmic and musical. She was a Parisian of Parisians. She could not be called beautiful exactly, and yet there was about her such an exciting zest, so highly spiced with airs and graces and manners peculiar to herself, that her lovers themselves would have maintained that there was no woman on earth so perfect in beauty. Her somewhat capricious nose, eyes not very large but sparkling with wit, a slightly sensual mouth, pale rosy cheeks framed in by silky brown hair, composed the most adorably saucy face imaginable. For the rest, she had small feet, slender hands, a well shaped figure, neat, well turned ankles and wrists, — every mark of

being thorough-bred. I will spare you the description of her dress. You must be satisfied with knowing that she was dressed in the fashion of to-morrow.

"Come! there is no doubt that Fortunio is playing us false," cried the host, swallowing a deep draught of Constantia wine. "I have a great mind, when I next meet him, to propose that we should cut each others' throats."

"I am of your opinion," said Arabella, "for it is not easy to meet my lord Fortunio. Chance is the only one clever enough to do so. I wanted to meet him, — not to cut his throat, far from it; but I could not find him, though I looked for him in every place where he might be, next in every place where he might not be. I went to the Bois de Boulogne, to the Bouffes, to the Opera, yes, even to church! and no more met Fortunio than if he had never lived. Fortunio is not a man, he is a dream."

"What was it that you were in such a hurry to ask of him?" said Musidora, with a lazy glance at Arabella.

"The genuine slippers of a Chinese princess, as he told me one morning when he was somewhat tipsy, and which he promised to give me after he had kissed

my foot, because I was the only woman in France who could wear them."

"Why don't you go to his residence?" said Alfred, Cynthia's expectant lover.

"To his residence! That is easy to say, but difficult to do."

"Yes, he must be out a good deal. He is a man of many distractions," added the ex-lover.

"You do not understand me. To go to his residence, first you must know where it is."

"Yet he has got to live somewhere, unless he roosts, which is of course possible," said George. "Does any one of you adorable princesses know by any chance on what branch of a miraculous tree that fine bird has built its nest?"

"If I knew it, Messer Giorgio, I should not be here, I swear to you, and you may believe me," said the silent Roman.

"Nonsense!" said Alfred, "who wants a residence? Ladies nowadays offer hospitality so lavishly."

"Which of you, then, ladies, serves as a residence for Fortunio?"

"You are talking nonsense," replied George gravely. "Where would he put his clothes and his boots? A

man must always have a house to put his boots in. Besides, we had supper with Fortunio not long ago, and you were there, unless I am mistaken."

"So I was," said Alfred; "I had forgotten."

"I was there also," said Arabella. "For the matter of that, his supper was a good deal better than yours, George, although you pique yourself on being an adept in such matters. But it proves nothing, except that Fortunio is the most mysterious of mortals."

"There is nothing mysterious in entertaining twenty people at supper."

"Certainly not, but here is where the mystery lies, I had myself driven to the mansion where Fortunio received us, and no one seemed to know what I was talking about. Fortunio was perfectly unknown there. I set on foot inquiries which at first were fruitless, but at last I managed to find out that a young man whose name was not known, but who was exceedingly like him, had purchased the mansion for two hundred thousand francs, which he paid in bank notes, and that as soon as the bargain was struck an army of upholsterers and workmen of all sorts invaded the house and with magical speed placed it in the condition you saw it in. Numerous servants in full livery, a

chef, accompanied by a host of aids and kitchen servants bearing in great covered baskets provisions enough for an army, had arrived no one knows whence the very night of the supper. The next morning everything disappeared, the servants went away just as they had come, and Fortunio walked out not to return. There was left in the mansion only the old janitor to open the windows from time to time and air the rooms."

"If Arabella had drunk water only during the meal, I might perhaps believe what she is telling," broke in Phœbe, "but her story strikes me as being as crazy and disordered as the globules of champagne which rise to the surface of my glass. She takes us for children, and tells us fairy tales with deplorable seriousness."

"Indeed, you lunatic Phœbe, is that your opinion?" cried Arabella, with the dry, sharp tone which women alone know how to take among themselves. "Yet my tale is a much truer story than many another."

"Just let Phœbe talk, and go on," interrupted Musidora, whose curiosity was at last stirred.

"I tried every means, — that is to say, I tried the only means with which one may corrupt somebody or something, to corrupt the virtuous dragon of the en-

chanted castle. I gave him a great deal of money, but the conscientious rascal, who perhaps was afraid that I should take my money back, could not tell me anything simply because he knew nothing, which is an excellent reason for discretion. For the rest, the worthy man, very sorry at not having any secrets to betray, kindly offered to show me the entire house on the chance that I might find something which would enlighten me. I accepted, and preceded by the old fellow, who opened the most secret places, I visited every part with extreme care. I saw nothing which could enlighten my ignorance; there was not a scrap of paper, not a word, not a number. I went to the dealer who had sold the furniture, and who is one of the most celebrated in Paris. He had not seen Fortunio. It was a middle-aged man, looking like a steward and with the ways of a usurer, who had made every purchase. He did not know him at all otherwise. We had all been the dupes of a hallucination, and we had only thought we had supped with Fortunio."

"This is very strange — very strange — excessively strange," murmured the elegant Alfred, who for quite a time had not needed a mirror to see double. "Ha, ha! his creditors must be nicely sold."

"Nonsense! he has removed somewhere else or gone to the country; there is nothing mysterious in all that," said George.

"What is Fortunio?" said Phœbe.

"Why, Fortunio is Fortunio," broke in Alfred. "What does it matter to you?"

"He is a worthy gentleman, the most genuine marquis in the world. My father knew his very well indeed. His coat of arms would adorn any carriage," added George reflectively.

"He is very handsome," said Cynthia, "as handsome as Guido's Saint Michael in Rome with which I was in love when I was a child."

"No one has finer manners, and besides he is as witty as Mercutio," continued Arabella.

"He is said to be enormously rich, richer than all the Rothschilds together, and as generous as the magnifico in La Fontaine's tale," put in Phœbe.

"Then who is the mistress of that happy personage, who seems to have had a fairy godmother?" said Musidora.

"No one knows, for to all these virtues Fortunio joins absolute reserve; but certainly it is not one of you, for whichever it was would have shouted it on the

housetops," answered George. "It shall be you if you like — or if you are able, for Fortunio appears to be very thoroughly protected against the darts of love, and the glances of your cat's eyes, sharp and burning though they are, do not appear to me likely to find the point of his armour."

"A young English peer with six hundred thousand a year blew out his brains on my account," said Musidora disdainfully.

"Yes, but you may jump over a bridge with your handsomest dress and a brand-new bonnet, before you get Fortunio."

"He is a devil, then, your Fortunio? Never mind; I wager I will make him madly in love with me before six weeks are past."

"If he were only a devil, it would not be so difficult, and you could easily manage to do what you propose. To deceive the devil is child's play for a woman."

"Then he is an angel?"

"Not an angel, either. But you shall judge for yourself, for the gates of the mansion have just been thrown open, and I hear the sound of a carriage in the court. It must be he. I will wager my dapple-gray

horses against one of your curl-papers, that you will not find a spot as big as a mouse-hole by which you can penetrate into Fortunio's heart."

"In that case, I shall drive to Longchamp in a carriage and four," said the girl, joyfully clapping her hands.

"Mr. Fortunio!" called in a shrill voice, which for a moment overcame the buzz of conversation and the clinking of glasses, a tall mulatto in a quaint costume.

All heads were suddenly turned in that direction; the meal was suspended.

Fortunio walked firmly and quickly towards George's arm-chair and shook hands with him.

"Ah, good morning, Fortunio! Why the devil are you so late?"

"You must pardon me, ladies; I have just come from Venice, where I had been invited to a very brilliant masked ball at the Princess Fiamma's. I forgot to tell George when he met me at the Opera and asked me to come to his entertainment. I have scarcely had time to change my clothes."

"Oh! If you go to balls in Venice, I have nothing more to say, but I rather think, Fortunio, that I saw you on the Boulevard de Gand less than a week ago.

You are lying like an epitaph or an official newspaper, my young friend."

"Quite right; I was on the Boulevard de Gand with Marcilly. There is nothing surprising in that."

"Oh! nothing, unless you own Faust's travelling-cloak, or have found a means to steer balloons or to ride on eagles; otherwise that ubiquity of yours appears rather improbable to me."

"Nonsense!" said Fortunio, chinking the money in his purse with a careless gesture, "if you ride this kind of thing you can get on much faster than if you had a hippogriff between your legs. Now I should much like to have a drink. My tongue is dried up for want of liquor. Mercury, bring me the Hercules cup!"

The Hercules cup was a great carved vase as large as the brazen sea supported by twelve oxen, spoken of in the Bible, and which the greatest topers never lifted save with some dismay.

"Mercury, pour into that thimble a drop of any kind of liquor, for thirst stifles me as if it were a neck-tie drawn too tight."

Mercury poured from on high, like the pages in Terburg's paintings, the contents of an antique urn magnificently chased, the handles of which were

formed of two Cupids, trying to embrace each other. Young Fortunio seized the heavy cup with a firm hand and emptied it at a draught. This splendid deed won him universal admiration.

"Oh, Mercury! Is there not some of this cheap wine left in your master's cellar? I should like to have another cup of it."

Mercury, astounded, hesitated a second, glancing to George to know if he should obey, but George's eyes, in a mist of intoxication, did not express anything.

"Well, you brute! Must I repeat things twice? If I were your master, I would have you skinned alive and hung up by the feet until I could do better for you."

Mercury hastened to take another vase from another sideboard, overset it above the cup, then withdrew with a timid air, and stood at a distance on one foot, looking like a heron in a marsh, awaiting the result with a sort of respectful anxiety.

Worthy Fortunio drained the vast cup with a facility which gave proof of long and patient study as to the best way of imbibing lush, as Master Alcofribas Nasier would say.

"Now, gentlemen, I am all ready. I have made up for lost time, and we can sup quietly. Perhaps you

thought I came late for fear of having to drink, and entertained the most awful suspicions about my manners. Now you must surely consider me as innocent as a three months' lamb or a boarding-school girl going to her first communion."

"Oh, yes," said Alfred, "you are as innocent as a robber led to the gibbet."

The suggestion of Fortunio to sup quietly was absurd, for certainly nothing was more impossible. Jupiter might have come through the ceiling with his eagle and his thunderbolts, and no one would have paid any attention to him.

Musidora was about the only one who appeared to have kept her senses. Fortunio's presence had aroused her from her torpor; she was as wide awake as an adder that has long been teased with a straw. Her green eyes sparkled strangely, her nostrils swelled, the malicious corners of her mouth were drawn up, she no longer leaned against the cushion in her arm-chair, she sat upright like a horseman standing in his stirrups about to strike and making sure of his blow. George's dapple-gray horses were trotting and prancing in her mind, and she saw herself already lying back on the cushions of the carriage, raising the fashion-

able dust of the Bois de Boulogne with her whirling wheels.

Besides, Fortunio alone took her fancy quite as much as George's four horses, and the equipage was now secondary in importance to the perilous conquest which she was attempting. She sought within her arsenal for the most murderous glance, the most amorously victorious smile to address to him and pierce his heart. Until the moment came for a deadly blow she kept watching Fortunio with deep attention concealed under an appearance of trifling. She observed his every motion, she surrounded him with lines of circumvallation, and tried to enclose him within a network of coquetry. For Fortunio was the living type of the virile ideal dreamed of by women, and which men unfortunately realise so rarely, preferring, as they do, to abuse the permission which they have of being ugly.

Fortunio seems to be not more than twenty-four years of age. He is of middle stature, well set-up, thorough-bred, and vigorous-looking, with a gentle, resolute look, broad shoulders, delicate hands and feet, a mixture of grace and strength irresistibly effective. His movements are as velvety as those of a young jaguar, and under their nonchalant slowness, prodigious

vivacity and quickness make themselves felt. His head is of the purest type of Southern beauty, rather Spanish than French, rather Arab than Spanish in character. No artist could draw a more perfect oval than that of his face. His well-shaped nose, slightly aquiline and clean cut, relieves the feminine purity of the other features and gives him something of a proud look. Velvety black eyebrows, turning bluish at the ends, show clean above his long eyelids, which look as if coloured with *kohl*, after the Oriental fashion. Through a singular chance the pupils of his brilliant eyes are of a celestial blue as brilliant as the azure of a mountain tarn; imperceptible brown lines ring them and set off their diamond-like brilliancy. His mouth has the vivid, moist rosiness becoming very rare indeed, which is a sign of richness of blood. The somewhat thick lower lip is full of voluptuous ardour; the upper, finer, narrower, somewhat drawn in at the ends with an expression of humorous disdain tempered by the kindliness of the rest of the face, denotes resolution and great power of will. A moustache that does not seem to have been often cut, shadows the angles of the mouth with soft, silky hair. The delicately rounded chin, with a

dimple in the centre, runs by a powerful line into an athletic neck, — the neck of a young bull that has never known the yoke. The brow, though not as high and broad as that of a fashionable poet, is nevertheless handsome and broad; the temples are smooth, and the parts over which the hair usually falls have a satin-like sheen. The tone of the brow is fairer than that of the face, tanned by a sun more brilliant than ours with a warm, golden tone, under which show rosy and bluish tints whose bloom revives the somewhat swart dryness of the rich, warm tone beloved of artists. Hair as black as a crow's lustrous wing, long, and slightly curled, falls around the pale face in happy disorder. The ear is small and colourless, and seems to have been pierced.

So far as the hideous modern costume enables one to judge, his frame is admirably proportioned; his limbs round and vigorous, muscles of steel covered with a velvety skin, something like the Indian Bacchus in the Museum of Antiquities, which in its harmonious perfection rivals the Venus of Milo herself, for there is nothing on earth so beautiful as grace united to strength. Under the dazzling whiteness of his shirt front one feels there is a broad, powerful chest, solid and polished

like marble, on which it must be delightful for a woman to rest her head. Arms modelled as beautifully as those of Antinoüs, ending in hands inimitable in their perfection, can be guessed at through the close-fitting sleeve.

As for the rest of the costume, I shall not describe it, for the description of a modern sack coat and pair of trousers would make bolder men than I draw back with horror. But you can imagine what it is by recalling the masterpieces of the best tailors in Paris, which you have admired on some dandy at a concert, at the promenade, or elsewhere; then you must mentally add a divine elegance, a certain aristocratic and nonchalant carelessness, a modesty full of assurance and self-possession, a careless grace, manners which you have never certainly seen in any dandy: also, on the first finger of the left hand a huge diamond fine enough to rival the Regent and the Sancy diamonds, casting to right and left a blaze of light.

Musidora was a prey to the most violent emotion, although apparently she was quite at her ease. Until then she had been kept from loving by a delicate instinct, a deep feeling for beauty; amid her mad courtesan's life she had remained in perfect ignorance of

passion. Her senses, excited too early, were dulled, and all the intrigues she began or broke off so easily were dictated by interest or mere fancy. As is the case with all women who have known many men, the sex inspired her with deep disgust. Dainty Musidora thought all men thoroughly despicable, and also exceedingly ugly. Their exterior did not please her any more than their minds. Insignificant or deformed, earthy or apoplectic, with bilious or blotched faces, blue when shaved, marked with deep wrinkles, rough wild hair, muscular, hairy arms did not charm her. The excessive delicacy of her temperament made her feel these defects much more keenly; a man who was but a man to robust Cynthia seemed a wild boar to her. Although Musidora was eighteen, she was not really a woman, she was not even a girl, she was a child, utterly corrupt, it is true, and concealing within her frail form hyperdiabolical wickedness. With her candid air, she would have duped cardinals and tricked Talleyrand. She therefore had remarkable advantages over her rivals, for her well-known indifference and coldness were a sort of virginity which any one would have been glad to take from her. She had the art of creating obstacles and irritating desire by erecting a barrier

against it. She was less fortunate this time, however, in her attempts at seduction. In spite of her kitten-like airs and her pretty manners, Fortunio paid her only just as much attention as a well-bred man does to any woman sitting near him; that is, the meaningless semi-familiar attentions which one indulges in with a pretty woman.

Musidora did her best to draw him into more tender conversation and some of those rather warmly gallant phrases which may be taken at a pinch for a confession, or even for a plain declaration of love; but Fortunio, like a sly fish, wisely played around the net, and did not enter it. He replied evasively to Musidora's insinuating questions, and at the very moment when she thought she had him, would break away with an unexpected joke. She tried every possible plan, made false confidences to him in order to obtain real ones, questioned him about his travels, his life, and his tastes. Fortunio drank, ate, laughed, said yes or no, and slipped between her fingers more fluid and more difficult to retain than quicksilver.

"Why, George!" said Musidora, bending towards him, "this man is like a porcupine. I do not know how to take him."

"Take care not to spit your heart on one of his quills, my queenlet," replied George.

"What life has he led? what is he made of?" said Musidora, troubled.

"The devil knows," replied George, with a shrug of the shoulders full of meaning.

"Fortunio! Fortunio!" cried Arabella, rising at the other end of the table; "When am I going to get your Chinese princess's slippers?"

"They are in your room, fair lady, carefully placed on the tiger skin which you use for a carpet."

"Nonsense, Fortunio! you have never entered my bedroom, and last night there were certainly no slippers at the foot of my bed."

"Probably you did not look carefully. I assure you they are there," said Fortunio, imbibing a deep draught of wine.

Arabella smiled incredulously.

"Is it true," said Musidora, with childish coquetry, "that these slippers were given to you by a Chinese princess?"

"I think so," replied Fortunio. "She was called Yu Tsu. A lovely girl! She had a silver ring in her nostrils and her brow was covered with gold plates. I

wrote madrigals for her, in which I told her that she had a jade-like skin and eyes like willow leaves."

"Was she prettier than I?" broke in Musidora, looking towards Fortunio as if to make the comparison easier.

"It depends. She had small wrinkled eyes turned up at the corners, a flat nose, and red teeth."

"Oh, the monster! she must have been hideous."

"Not at all; she passed for an incomparable beauty. All the mandarins were madly in love with her."

"And were you?" said Musidora, piqued.

"She adored me, and I let her do so."

"Mr. Fortunio, either you are amazingly conceited or else you are making fun of us. You bought the slippers in some curiosity shop."

"I swear to you I did not. You ask questions and I answer them. As for the slippers, they were not bought. Besides, who has not gone to China some time or another? Won't you have some of this sherry? It is excellent."

"Pass me your glass," said Musidora with a graceful smile. Fortunio held it out to her without being astonished at so signal a favour. Musidora carried to her lips the side which Fortunio's mouth had touched.

When she had drunk, he filled and emptied the glass very quietly, as if a young and lovely woman had not just touched it familiarly with her pretty, rosy lips.

Musidora did not give up the game, but by a clever movement threw off her satin slipper and put her foot on Fortunio's. Her silk stocking, more tenuous than a cobweb, enabled the perfection and the ivory polish of this Cinderella-like foot to be felt in full.

"Don't you think, Fortunio, I could put on your princess's slippers?" said Musidora, her cheeks burning as she lightly pressed Fortunio's foot with her own.

"They would be too large for you," quietly replied Fortunio, and he went on drinking without further ceremony.

This might have passed for a compliment but for Fortunio's indifferent air, so Musidora did not look upon it as a favourable omen. Seeing that her efforts were in vain, she changed her plan, affected indifference, — without, however, taking away her foot, — and talked with George. Her coldness was no more successful than her coquetry had been. Fortunio spoke to her at long intervals only, as if to discharge a duty. Musidora thought she noticed that Fortunio was slightly pressing her knee, but she soon found out her mistake.

While this business was going on, I need not say that the rest of the company were drinking heavily and indulging in the most gigantic bacchanal imaginable. The fashionable Alfred called for the heads of tyrants and the abolition of the slave trade, to the great amazement of the negro waiters, astounded at such sudden philanthropy; two of the gentlemen had suddenly slipped from their chairs under the table and were snoring like priests in church; the others were warbling and shrieking something or another in most lamentable and funereal fashion, an agreeable occupation which they interrupted from time to time to relate to themselves their own successes, for no one was fit to listen.

The women, who had resisted longer, were at last being drawn into the whirlpool. Arabella was so tipsy that she forgot to be coquettish; Phœbe, her two elbows on the table, was gazing with stupid fixity at one of the figures of the centre-piece which she did not see. As for the Roman, she was wonderful in her placid peace. She was gently wagging her head and seemed to beat time to music that she alone could hear; an idle smile played upon her half-opened lips like a bird over a rose, and her long dark lashes

and black eyes cast a deep shadow over her rosy cheeks. Her two hands were placed one upon the other like those of the Roman woman in Ingres' magnificent portrait, and her striking calm was in marked contrast with the general turbulence.

As for Musidora, the drop of sherry was beginning to go to her head. Her brow was pearly with a slight perspiration, fatigue overcame her in spite of herself, the little golden dust of sleep began to roll in her eyes; she dozed off like a little bird that feels warm in its downy nest. From time to time she half opened her lovely eyelids to look at Fortunio, whose splendid profile stood out superbly against the background of dazzling light. Then she closed them, seeing him all the same, for the beginnings of the dreams she indulged in were still full of Fortunio. Then she let fall her head like a flower overcharged with dew, mechanically drew over her eyes two or three curls of her beautiful fair hair as if to make a curtain of them, and fell fast asleep.

"Ah!" said George, "Musidora has tucked her head under her wing. Look what a lovely mouth she has. She could sleep in the midst of an orchestra of drums. She is very pretty, and yet I prefer my

Titians. Between you and me, Fortunio, I have never loved any one but the beautiful girl who is lying above that door on her bed of red velvet. Just look at her hand, her arm, her shoulder! What wonderful drawing, what vigour of life and colour!"

"Take care, Giorgio *carissimo*, take care! You worry me, you may get pleurisy if you excite yourself thus. Preserve yourself for the sake of your worthy parents, who want you to be a peer of France and a minister. You are wrong to slander nature, which has its value. You are talking of the shoulder of that painted woman? Why, look at Cynthia yonder, who says nothing and lets her eyes wander on the ceiling, thinking perhaps of her first love in a little brick house in the Transteverine Quarter, and whose shoulders are finer than those of any Titian in Venice or Spain. Come here, Cynthia, show us your back and bosom, and prove to that fellow George that God is not as unskilful as he pretends."

The beautiful Roman woman rose, gravely undid her dress, which slipped down to her waist, and showed a bosom wonderful in its purity of line, and shoulders and arms fit to make a god come down from heaven to kiss them.

"Put on your dress, we have seen you enough."

The Roman woman slowly went back to her seat. As for George, he still repeated, "I prefer my Titians."

The candles were burning low; the negroes, worn out, had fallen asleep standing leaning against the wall. The table, so splendidly set, was in the most frightful disorder, stained with wine, covered with débris; the elegant confections were falling to pieces, the marvellous dessert of fruit, pineapples and Chili strawberries, the dishes dressed with such care, all had been destroyed, upset, and wasted; the cloth looked like a battlefield. Yet some of the more obstinate among the guests were still struggling with the despair of unfortunate courage, and tried to overcome drunkenness and sleep; but they had lost their dash and vigour; they could scarcely make a noise, and were unable even to break the china and the glassware, which is the violent method used to revive a waning orgy.

George himself was turning green in a very marked manner, and had just entered that unhealthy period of intoxication when a man begins to talk of morality and to celebrate the charms of virtue. Fortunio alone, still fresh, his eye clear, his lips red, with a calm restfulness

like that of a devotee about to go to communion, his mind as free as when he had come in, was playing carelessly with his silver-gilt knife, and appeared ready to begin again.

"Well!" said Fortunio, "no one drinking! That is poor hospitality. I am as dry as sand after a fortnight's drought."

An immense bowl of arrack punch was brought in, lighted and blazing, the pretty flames gliding over the surface like a round of will-o'-the-wisps. George filled his own glass and Fortunio's with the blazing liquor, seized the bowl by its pedestal and threw it on the floor, saying with a gesture of ineffable contempt, "It is better to throw it away than to profane it by giving it to such brutes. Let us cook them alive, since they will not drink. We are justified in doing so, for they are only beasts."

The blazing liquid spread over the floor, and the bluish tongues began to lick the feet of the sleepers and the edges of the tablecloth. The gleam of the improvised conflagration at once flashed through the most carefully closed eyelids, and soon everybody was up — even the worthy gentlemen who had slid down at the beginning of the storm and who would unques-

tionably have been cooked alive if Mercury the negro and Jupiter the mulatto had not helped them to emerge from the dark subterranean places where they were lying.

"Where is Fortunio?" asked Musidora, pushing aside her curls.

"Fortunio?" said George, "he was here just now."

"He has gone," said Jupiter, respectfully.

"Who knows when we shall see him again? Perhaps he has gone to drink with the Grand Mogul or Prester John. Queenlet, I am afraid you will be obliged to go on foot or in a hired carriage like a virtuous girl. If you come upon him, you will be mighty lucky."

"Never mind," said Musidora, drawing from her bosom a small pocket-book with gold corners; "I have got his pocket-book."

"Why, you femaled evil! You are a well brought-up girl! Never would ordinary parents have thought of teaching you to steal."

II

Musidora did not awake until about three in the afternoon, which is a very sensible hour. She care-

lessly stretched out her arm towards a silk cord hanging near her bed, but her white hand fell back.

Musidora's bed was extremely plain. It in no wise resembled the beds of rich middle-class women, that look like street altars erected for Corpus Christi Day. This bed was as fresh and charming as the interior of a harebell. Curtains of Indian muslin lined with white cashmere hung in cloudy folds from a broad silver rose fixed in the ceiling and fell around an elegant bedstead of very pale citron-wood with ivory feet and inlaid work. Through the sheets of ideally fine, vaporous Holland linen, showed softly the pale rose-coloured mattresses filled with the silkiest of Thibetan wool. That precious wool, probably the real golden fleece that Jason set forth in search of on the ship Argo, seemed scarcely costly enough to Musidora for ordinary mattresses. Her devilish pride was inwardly flattered at the thought that her bed held the price of the corruption of twenty honest girls, and that two or three yards of that woven and dyed wool would make the fiercest scruples suddenly yield. A double bolster edged with English point-lace yielded softly under her little head, sunk in its fair curls scattered around her like the water from a naiad's urn. A white

satin coverlet filled with the costly down which the eider plucks from its wings to warm its dear young was spread over her like a warm fall of snow, and under the folds of the stuff could be faintly seen a charming little slope formed by her half-drawn up knee.

That is how the lovely Musidora was bedded. For that single bed, Africa had given its largest elephant tusks, America its costliest wood, Mazulipatam its muslin, Cashmere its wool, Norway its down, France its skill. The whole world had been ransacked, and each corner of it had contributed its highest luxury. It is only courtesans, who have spent their childhood in eating raw apples, who can indulge in such insolently brazen luxury. Heliogabalus and Séguin did not more enjoy soiling gold and making it vile than this frail girl whose name was Musidora.

However, the girl's bed, as I have said, was none the less of the most maidenly simplicity. The rest of the furniture was just as ruinously simple. The walls and the ceiling were hung with white satin relieved with rose and silver cords. A white carpet, thick as the sward strewn with roses that seemed living, covers the rosewood floor. Doors so accurately cut in the hangings that it was difficult to see where they were,

had handles and guards of beautifully cut Irish crystal. The clock was made of a block of Oriental jasper with a dial of inlaid platinum. At the bed head, by way of night light, there was placed upon an elegant table a small red clay Etruscan lamp of the most correct form, with charming drawings of winged chimeras and women at their toilet. A few chairs, the indispensable sofa, and a mosaic table, composed the rest of the furniture.

Musidora opened her little mouth as wide as she could without managing to yawn very wide. Her pearly teeth showed like dewdrops within a poppy, and most lovely they looked. Musidora's yawn was more graceful than any other woman's smile. She closed her silken eyelashes, lay on her left side, then on her right, and seeing that she could not hope to sleep again, uttered a soft, languidly modulated sigh as full of reverie and thought as a note of Beethoven. For the second time she stretched her arm towards her bell. An unseen door concealed in the wall opened partially, and through the narrow opening glided into the room a tall, well-made girl with a picturesque bandana headdress in the Creole fashion. She came on tiptoe to her mistress's bedside and awaited her orders in silence.

"Jacintha, draw back the window-shades and help me to sit up."

Jacintha drew aside the heavy curtains. A bright, saucy ray of sunshine burst into the room like a spoiled child, accustomed to be well received everywhere on account of his gaiety.

"Oh, you wretch! Do you want to blind me and to make me darker than a bear's nose and the hands of a tight-rope dancer?" moaned Musidora. "Put out that dreadful sun quickly. So, that is right. Now beat up my pillows."

Jacintha took two or three, which she beat up and arranged softly behind the back of her voluptuous mistress.

"What do you wish next, madam?" said Jacintha, seeing that Musidora did not make the gesture with which she was in the habit of dismissing her.

"Tell Jack to bring me my English cat, and have my bath made ready."

The door opened softly, and Jacintha disappeared as she had come in.

III

I BELIEVE it not out of place to devote a chapter to Musidora's cat, a charming animal, which is quite as good as the lion of Androcles, Pellisson's spider, the dog of Montargis, and other virtuous and learned animals whose memory has been preserved by grave historians.

It is a common saying, "Like dog, like master," and it might be said also, "Like cat, like mistress." Musidora's cat was white, fabulously white, whiter than the whitest of swans. Milk, alabaster, snow, whatever has served to make white comparisons since the beginning of the world, would have seemed black by its side. Of the millions of imperceptible hairs which composed its ermine fur, there was not one which did not shine like the purest silver. Imagine a great puff with a pair of eyes in it. Never did the most coquettish and mannered woman have the perfect grace and finish of movement which this adorable cat exhibited. She undulated, arched her back, turned her head, curled her tail, put out and withdrew her paw in the daintiest fashion. Musidora copied her as closely as she could, though she was far from equalling her; yet, imperfect as was the imitation, it had made Musidora one of the

most graceful women in Paris, — that is, in the world, for there is nothing here below but Paris.

A little negro, dressed in black from head to foot by way of more striking contrast, is charged with the care of this discreet, white creature. He puts her to bed every evening in a cradle of sky-blue satin, and brings her to her mistress in the morning. He is also charged with feeding the cat, combing her, washing her ears, smoothing her moustaches, and putting on her collar, — a collar of genuine, fine pearls of very great price. There are virtuous mortals who will no doubt be indignant that so much luxury should be lavished upon a mere animal, and who will say that it would have been much better to spend the money on bread for the poor. To begin with, people do not give bread to the poor, they give them a sou, and not very often either, for if everybody gave a sou every day, the poor would be richer than nabobs. Then I must ask the worthy philanthropists who distribute economic soup to observe that the existence of Musidora's cat is just as useful as anything else.

First, it pleases Musidora, and prevents her slapping two or three maids a day. Secondly, the little negro, who has nothing to do but to care for this animal

would otherwise be cooking in the West Indian sun, where he would be thrashed from morning to night and from night to morning; instead of which he is well fed, well clothed, and all he has to do is to show black by the side of the white creature. Thirdly, the charming cat has no greater pleasure than to use her claws upon the interior lining of her little sky-blue boudoir, so that a new one has to be provided pretty much every month, and that is enough to pay for the schooling of the two children of Musidora's upholsterer; so France will be indebted to that remarkable white cat for a barrister and a doctor. Fourthly, three little peasants are earning enough to pay for a man if they should be drawn by the conscription, by catching with lime little birds for the breakfast and dinner of the cat, that would refuse to eat them if they were not alive.

The pretty, voluptuous animal, almost as cruel as a woman who is bored, likes to hear her dinner chirping in her stomach, and there is nothing living enough for her. To my knowledge that is her one defect.

As for the collar, it was given to Musidora by a general of the Empire who stole it in Spain from a black Madonna. It was in the shape of a bracelet. It passed straight from the very white arm of the young

girl to the whiter neck of the cat. I consider that a pearl collar is much more in its place on the velvety neck of a pretty cat than on the red and skinny neck of an old Englishwoman.

All this may appear a digression to some of my readers. I am entirely of their opinion, but without digressions and episodes how could one possibly write a novel or poem, and how could one read either after it is written?

IV

When the negro had brought the white cat and placed her by his mistress's side on the snow-white down, Musidora, now wide awake, began to remember a certain Fortunio whom she had seen the night before at George's supper. The features of the beautiful face, made finer by sleep, now showed clearly within her memory. She saw him again, handsome, smiling, and calm in the midst of the dreadful noise, as inaccessible to intoxication as to love. She recalled the wager she had made that she would enter with drums beating and standards flying into the fortress of that impregnable heart before six weeks were out, and that she would warm her feet on the very andirons of that elegant

vagabond whose real dwelling no one knew. The victoria with its four dapple-gray horses, its postilions in satin jackets, its cracking of whips, and its flash of varnish passed before her eyes like a whirlwind. She clapped her little hands with joy, so sure was she of success. "How delightful it will be," she said, laughing to herself, "to take Fortunio driving in the very carriage he will have helped me to win!" And to begin hostilities, she put her hand under the pillow and drew from it the stolen pocket-book, which she had in vain tried to open the night before.

"I shall manage it," she said, turning it over in every possible way. "Just imagine a woman feeling there is a secret behind so slight a guard, and not breaking it down. For my part, I would have undone the Gordian knot without needing a sword like that brute Alexander."

Musidora sat up, and with the swiftness of a ferret looking for a hole into which she may insert her sharp nose to reach some preserve full of milk and fresh eggs, began to look for the secret which was to give access to the mysterious pocket-book, wherein, no doubt, she would find valuable information concerning my hero. She felt with her fingers, more delicate than

the antennæ of insects or the horns of a snail, every rib and every rugosity of the leather; one after another, she pressed every turquoise and every chrysoprase which studded the two outer surfaces of the pocket-book; she pressed with all her strength, until she actually bent back her frail, delicate thumb, upon the lock, to overcome the resistance of the spring. She might just as well have tried to open a strong-box banded with steel. She was so intent upon her attempt that a light perspiration began to show upon her delicate brow. It was long since she had worked so hard.

At last, despairing of opening the trusty pocket-book, she rang for Jacintha, and called for scissors with which to cut a portion of the cover, and thus manage to withdraw the letters and papers which might be within; but the leather was not even scratched by Musidora's fine English scissors. It was made of some lizard or serpent-skin tougher than bison or buffalo-skin. The imbricated scales, which Musidora had mistaken for stamped or symmetrical work, prevented any cutting of the leather.

However, Musidora had touched by chance the spot at which the pocket-book opened. The covers separated with a sharp snap like the click of a jack-in-the-box.

The young girl let fall the pocket-book on her lap, expecting to see spring from it an irritated genie as out of the magic jars of Arab tales, or an asp coiled up on its tail. Pandora never gazed in a more fearful attitude at the box of which she had raised the cover, and from which escaped in a dense smoke all the ills that afflict this earth. Yet, seeing that nothing came out, Musidora became reassured and picked up the book to examine it and ascertain what she had discovered.

A quaint, exotic, intoxicating perfume, unlike any known scents, spread through the room and acted voluptuously upon the olfactory nerves of the curious beauty. She stopped a moment to breathe in that strange aroma, then plunged her inquisitive fingers into the different parts of the pocket-book, which were made of silvery Chinese silk flushed with gold and greenish tints.

The first thing she drew from it was a large flower of curious shape, from which the colour seemed long since to have vanished. It was the *Pavetta Indica*, of which Dr. Rumphius speaks in his "Hortus Malabaricus." This gave no very clear information concerning my lord Fortunio.

Next, Musidora pulled out a small tress of blue hair intertwined with gold threads and having at each end a pierced golden sequin. Then a sheet of Japan paper covered with curious characters interlaced like network, on a background of silver flowers. She supposed this to be some plaintive epistle from the Princess Yu Tsu to the Lord Fortunio.

Musidora did not quite know what to make of this pocket-book so curiously filled; nevertheless, hoping to come across some more European and intelligible find, she emptied the other two pockets. All she got was a golden needle rusted and reddened at the point, and a small piece of papyrus covered with a great many characters which looked as if they might be in Oriental writing. The disappointed girl angrily threw the pocket-book into the very middle of the room.

"Alas!" said she, looking with an air of deep commiseration at her pretty fingers still marked with the useless work imposed upon them, "I shall not have the carriage, I shall not have Fortunio! — Jacintha, take me to my bath."

Jacintha threw around her mistress a great wrapper of muslin, took her up in her arms and lifted her like a sick child.

V

If Musidora is very much put out, I am even more so, for I reckoned upon that pocket-book to give my readers — may I be forgiven this piece of vanity! — accurate information concerning my mysterious hero. I had hoped that the pocket-book would contain love letters, drafts of tragedies, novels in two volumes or more, or visiting cards at least, as would necessarily be the case with the pocket-book of any well-conditioned hero. Cruel, indeed, is my embarrassment. For since Fortunio is the hero of my own choice, it is right that we should be interested in him and wish to know whatever he does. I must speak of him often, he must rise above the other characters and get to the end of my two hundred odd pages, dead or alive. And yet never was a hero more troublesome. You expect him and he does not come; you have got hold of him and he vanishes without a word, instead of making fine speeches and long discourses in poetic prose, as he ought to do in his character of hero of a novel.

It is true that he is handsome, but between you and me, I think he is eccentric, as tricky as a monkey,

full of conceit and caprice, more changeable than the moon, more variable than a chameleon. To these defects, which I can still forgive him, he adds that of refusing to speak of his own business to any one, which is unpardonable. He is satisfied with laughing, drinking, and being a well-bred man. He does not discourse of the passions, or of the metaphysics of the heart; he does not read fashionable novels; he tells, by way of adventures, of Malay or of Chinese intrigues only, which can in no wise harm the great ladies of the noble Faubourg. He does not roll his eyes at the moon at dessert, and never talks of any actress. In a word, he is a mediocre man who every one, I know not why, insists is witty, and whom I am very sorry to have taken for the principal character in my novel.

I have a good mind to drop him. Suppose I were to take George in his place? The latter has the abominable habit of getting tipsy morning and evening and sometimes during the course of the day, and also occasionally at night. What would you say, madam, to a hero that was always drunk and would talk for two hours at a stretch on the difference between the right and the left pinion of a partridge?

"What of Alfred?"

"He is too stupid."

"And de Marcilly?"

"He is not stupid enough."

So, for lack of a better, I shall keep Fortunio, and as soon as I know anything about him, I shall tell it to you. So let us, if you please, enter Musidora's bathroom.

VI

Musidora's bathroom is octagonal in form; the walls are lined half way up with small square tiles of blue and white porcelain. Paintings in light green monochrome representing Diana and Calisto, Salmacis and Hermaphrodite, Hylas surrounded by nymphs, Leda surprised by the swan, framed in richly wrought frames with reeds and water plants carved and silvered, are placed above the doors, over which hang chintz portières with a tiny flower pattern. Shells, madrepores, and corals ranged along the cornice complete the aquatic decoration.

The windows, glazed with azure blue and pale-green glass, shed on this mysterious retreat a soft and voluptuously chastened light, so that one might believe one's

self in the very palace of an Undine or a naiad. A beautiful bath of white marble supported by gilded claws fills up one end of the room. Opposite is the couch.

Musidora has just been brought by Jacintha to the edge of the bath-tub. While two handsome girls plunge their rosy arms into the tepid, smoking water, so as to make sure that the heat is even at the head and the foot, she walks about the room in Turkish fashion on two little pattens, and complains in a dying voice of the slowness and unskilfulness of her people, with as graceful impertinence as a duchess of the proudest times. Finally she draws near the bath lined with linen of exquisite fineness, slightly lifts her small, rounded, and polished leg and dips the tip of her toe into the water.

"Jacintha, support me!" she says, as she falls back upon the shoulder of her kneeling maid, "I am fainting!"

Then, in a sharp voice, the dryness of which scarcely matches her soft and affected manner: "So you want to cook me alive, to make me as red as a lobster for a week! I am quite sure that this evening the skin of my foot will come off with my stocking,"

she adds, speaking to the two maids. "Can you never prepare a bath properly?"

The bath was cooled. Musidora then ventured to put in her other leg, knelt down, her arms crossed on her bosom like the antique statues of Modesty, and at last stretched herself out in the water like a serpent compelled to untwist. Then she had some other complaint to make: the linen was so coarse it scratched her and marked her back and loins; that was always the way, they always did it on purpose,—she did not know what would come next; in a word, all that bad temper and disappointed curiosity can suggest to a pretty, wilful woman who has never been contradicted once in her life.

The soft warmth of the bath, however, seemed to diminish this nervous irritation, and Musidora let her lovely arms float nonchalantly over the water. Sometimes she raised them and enjoyed with childish curiosity seeing the water divide on her skin and roll to the right and to the left in transparent pearls.

Jacintha entered and whispered something to Musidora. It was to say that Arabella asked to see her.

"Tell her to come in," said Musidora, raising her body so as to bring it from the bottom of the bath to

the surface, in order that the glance should have to traverse only a thin layer of crystal to see the submerged perfections; for she knew that Arabella had said that she was thin, and she was not sorry to give the lie in unmistakable fashion to that statement; for Musidora, by a privilege peculiar to organizations of very strong vitality, was at once very slender and very plump.

"Well, you beauty, how are you?" said Arabella as she kissed Musidora.

"Fairly well, my health is improved. For some time past I have been putting on flesh," and the vindictive girl drew herself up still more. The tips of her breasts and one of her knees emerged from the water. "I seem thinner, don't I, when I am dressed?" she went on, fixing her cat-like eyes on Arabella, who could not help blushing a little.

"Yes, you are as plump as a little ortolan rolled in lard. That is a charming surprise you keep for your favoured ones. Usually one is deceived in the opposite way. But you do not know what has brought me."

"No; do you?" said Musidora, smiling.

"First, the pleasure of seeing you."

"That is not a sufficient reason."

"Well, I have come to tell you of an absurd, unimaginable, mad, impossible thing which upsets all preconceived notions. If I believed in the devil, I should say it was the devil in person."

"Have you really seen the devil, Arabella? I wish you would introduce him to me since you know him," said Musidora, with a half-incredulous look. "I have long desired to meet him."

"You remember the Chinese princess's slippers that Fortunio promised me? Well, I found them, just as he said, on the tiger skin at the foot of my bed. All the doors were closed, and that to my bedroom opens only by a combination which I alone know. Is it not strange? Fortunio is a demon in black coat and white gloves. How did he manage to pass through the key-hole with these slippers?"

"Perhaps you have some secret door, the key to which has been given him by some of your former lovers," said Musidora, with a somewhat venomous smile.

"No; that room is the one where I keep my diamonds and my jewels. It has but one door, which I carefully closed when I left to go to George's supper. Meanwhile, here are the slippers."

Arabella drew from her bosom two little shoes curi-

ously embroidered with gold thread and pearls, most Chinese in design and the prettiest imaginable.

"Why, the pearls are real, and the work is the finest of Eastern work!" said Musidora, examining the slippers. "It is a much more valuable gift than you fancied. Just look at those two pearls — Cleopatra's were neither purer nor rounder."

"Fortunio is really Oriental in his magificence, but he is as invisible as an Eastern king; he only shows himself when he chooses. I am afraid, dear Musidora, you will lose your wager."

"I am greatly afraid of it, too, Arabella. I pretended to go to sleep, but I profited by a moment when Fortunio, who did not mistrust me, had his attention called away, to snatch from him his pocket-book, the corner of which showed through his coat. To begin with, the accursed thing would not open, and I spent some two hours in finding the mysterious sesame which caused the springs to fly back and give up the precious secrets so carefully concealed. But as if Fortunio had guessed my intention, I found only a dried flower, a needle, and two bits of blackened paper covered with the most abominable scrawls. Is it not atrociously derisive?"

" May I see the pocket-book ? " said Arabella.

" Yes, if you wish to. I threw it away angrily in my room. Jacintha, go and fetch it."

Jacintha returned with the mysterious pocket-book.

Arabella smelled it all over, turned it, examined its every recess, but could discover nothing new. She remained thoughtful for a moment, and then, —

" Musidora," she said, " I have thought of something. Those papers must be written in some sort of a language. We ought to go to the Collège de France. There are professors of all sorts of languages there. We shall surely learn from these gentlemen, who are said to be so erudite, the explanation of this riddle."

" Jacintha ! Mary ! Annette ! Come and take me quickly out of this bath where I have been rotting for an hour. I can already feel drops of water growing out of my arms, and my hair is becoming as seaweed-like as that of a marine nymph," said Musidora, standing up in her bath. The sparkling drops of water, racing over her body, formed, as it were, a net-work of pearls ; she was lovely in that attitude. Her skin lightly touched by the kiss of the air, her long, fair hair falling upon her back and shoulders, her face gently flushed with the humidity of the bath, she looked like

a sylph rising with the first moonbeams from the heart of the flower bell where she has taken refuge during the day.

The servants hastened up, sponged off her body the last tears of the naiad, enveloped her carefully in a great cashmere wrapper over which they threw a vast Turkish shawl, put her feet into elegant slippers lined with swan's-down, and Musidora, leaning on the shoulder of her maid Jacintha, passed into her dressing-room with her friend Arabella.

There she was combed and perfumed, she put on a chemise with exquisite Valenciennes lace, she was shod, and every one of her clothes was put on her without her helping herself in the smallest degree. But when the maids had finished, she rose, stood before the mirror, and like a master who adds here and there a touch to the work carried out according to his design, by one of his pupils, she untied a ribbon, gave another form to a fold, passed her slender fingers through the masses of her hair to derange their too exact symmetry, and gave accent, life, and a poetic turn to the colourless work of her women.

Thereafter they breakfasted quickly, and Jack announced that the carriage was waiting.

We shall not begin the next chapter, and we shall not get into the carriage, without having said how Musidora was dressed. She had on a white India muslin with close-fitting sleeves, a rice-straw hat with a bunch of small flowers ideally delicate and light, a Venetian scarf of black lace gracefully thrown over her shoulders and somewhat drawn in at the waist, setting off admirably the abundance and richness of the folds of the dress, which stretched like marble tubes down to the smallest feet in the world. Add a jet necklace with large beads, mittens of black net, and a small watch thinner than a five-franc piece, suspended by a small silken cord, and you have Musidora's dress in full, which it is at least as important to be acquainted with as the exact year of the death of the Pharaoh Amenoteph.

VII

The carriage stopped before a house of mean appearance in a lonely, deserted street. You know those houses of the last century which have not been touched since they were built, and which the avarice of their owners allows to fall slowly into ruins, their gray walls weather-stained and spotted here and there with

broad splashes of yellow moss like the trunks of old ash-trees. The substructures are as green as a marsh in springtime, and a special flora might be made of all the herbs which grow on them. The slates on the roof have lost their colour, the wood of the doors is rotting and seems ready to fly into splinters at the least knock. False windows, formerly painted black to resemble panes, the colour of which has run from the second story to the first, show that when the house was built a very poor attempt was made to obtain symmetry. A vane cut out of tin and representing a sportsman firing at a hare, creaks at the angle of the roof and worthily crowns the sumptuous edifice.

The groom let down the steps and knocked at the door in such masterly fashion that he nearly broke it in. The janitress, terrified, put her head out of a broken window which she used both as a look-out and as a wicket. Her face was a mingling of snout, jowl, and muzzle. Her nose, of the most violent crimson, and of the shape of a carafe stopper, was studded with brilliant grog-blossoms, adorned with three or four extraordinarily long and stiff white hairs, like the bristles upon the noses of hippopotami, that gave her proboscis the look of a holy-water sprinkler. Her two

cheeks, rayed with red lines and marked with yellow blotches, were not unlike two vine-leaves killed by the autumn frost. A staring wall eye showed within its socket like a candle in a cellar. A sort of tusk of doubtful ivory turned up the corner of her upper lip like a boar's tusk and gave the finishing touch to the charm of her physiognomy. The lappets of her cap, flabby and wrinkled like elephants' ears, hung down her skinny jowls and formed a suitable frame for the whole.

Musidora was very nearly frightened at the sight of this grotesque Medusa, who fixed upon her two dirty-gray, inquisitive eyes.

"Is Mr. V—— at home?" asked Arabella.

"Certainly, madam, he is; he never goes out except to his courses, poor dear man. A very learned man, — no more trouble in the house than a tame mouse. You will find him at the back of the yard, the left hand stair, second story, the door with a hare's-foot, — you cannot mistake."

Musidora and Arabella crossed the yard, holding up their skirts as if they were walking through a meadow wet with dew. The grass was growing between the paving stones as freely as in the open ground.

But, seeing that they hesitated, the horrible Cerberus left her room and advanced towards them, waddling and limping like a wounded shepherd-spider.

"This way, ladies, this way. This is the path in the centre. This is not a house like republics in which people come and go; and yet it is not more than six weeks since I hurt my hands cutting the grass. Are you relatives of Mr. V——'s?"

Musidora shook her head negatively.

"I have heard him say that he had some country relatives who were coming to Paris."

They had now reached Mr. V——'s door, and as neither Arabella nor Musidora had answered her, the viscous, sticky beast caught hold of the balustrade and let herself slide grumbling to the foot of the stair, trusting to the cleverness of Miss Césarine, the professor's housekeeper, to obtain fuller information.

Arabella pulled at the hare's-foot. The cracked, shrill tinkling of a bell was heard in the mysterious depths of the apartment, two or three doors were opened and closed in the distance, a dry cough was heard, and a sound of heavy steps drew near. For a few moments there was a noise of heavy keys and of ironwork, of bolts drawn, of padlocks opened. Then

the door, slightly ajar, gave passage to the pointed, inquisitive nose of Miss Césarine, a beauty long past her prime. At the sight of the two young women her face instantly assumed a sour expression, tempered, however, by the respect inspired by the brilliant gold chain which Arabella wore around her neck.

"We wish to see Mr. V——."

The old woman opened the door wide and showed the two beauties into an antechamber which also served as a dining-room. It was hung with jasper-green paper and adorned with framed engravings representing the four seasons, and a barometer wrapped up in gauze to preserve it from the flies. A white earthenware stove, the pipe of which was carried into the opposite wall, a walnut table, and a few straw-bottomed chairs composed the rest of the furniture. Small, round pieces of waxed cloth were placed opposite each chair to save the red colour of the tiling, and a band of carpet ran from the entrance door to the door of the other room, also for the purpose of preserving the precious layer of red ochre so carefully waxed and wiped by Césarine. The latter recommended the two young women to walk along the carpet, whereat Musidora smiled, for she was much more

desirous of not soiling her shoes than of not marking the tiling.

The second room was a parlour hung with yellow, with furniture of old yellow Utrecht velvet. The worn and polished backs of the chairs testified to long and loyal service. China busts of Voltaire and Rousseau, a pair of gilt brass candlesticks bearing tapers, and a clock with a group of Time killing Love, or Love killing Time, I really do not know which, adorned the mantelpiece.

An oil painting of Mr. V——, and one of his wife, — fortunately dead, — in the full dress of 1810, made this room the finest in the apartment, and Césarine herself, overcome with so much magnificence, crossed it only with much internal respect, although for a long time she must have been familiarised with its splendour.

The duenna begged the two ladies to be kind enough to wait a few minutes while she informed her master, who was shut up in his study, buried, according to his habit, in learned researches.

He was standing before the mantelpiece in an attitude of the most intense contemplation. He held between his finger and thumb a small piece of toast, which he was crumbling up from time to time into a

bowl of clear, sparkling water, where played three gold-fish. The bottom of the bowl was filled with fine sand and shells. A ray of light traversed this crystalline globe, which the motions of the three fishes tinged with burning and changing rainbow-like tints. It was really a very beautiful sight, and a colourist would not have disdained to study the play of light and the brilliant reflections; but Mr. V—— paid no attention to the alternate gold, silver, and purple with which the twisting and turning of the fishes coloured the diaphanous prism in which they were enclosed.

"Césarine," said he, with the most serious and the most solemn look, "the big red fellow is too greedy and prevents the others feeding. He will have to be put in a separate bowl."

It was in this important occupation that Mr. V——, professor of Chinese and Manchoo, spent regularly three hours a day, carefully shut up in his study as if he were commenting on the precepts of the wisdom of the celebrated Confucius or the "Treatise on the Breeding of Silkworms."

"It is not a case of goldfish and their quarrels," said Césarine dryly. "There are two ladies in the drawing-room who want to see you."

"Two ladies to see me, Césarine?" cried the learned scholar, as he put one hand to his wig and the other to his breeches which, carelessly fastened, allowed the shirt to show between the belt and the waistcoat as through a Spanish slashing. "Two young and pretty ladies? I am scarcely presentable. Césarine, get me my dressing-gown. I have no doubt they are duchesses who have read my treatise on Manchoo punctuation and have fallen in love with me."

He slipped, trembling with haste, his thin arms into the great sleeves of his dressing-gown, and went into the drawing-room.

On seeing Arabella and Musidora, the old scholar at once pulled his wig down to his eyes and made three bows to them, trying to be as graceful as possible.

"Sir," said Musidora, "throughout France and Europe every one speaks of your amazing erudition."

"You are very good, madam," said the professor, who blushed poppy-red with pleasure.

"We are told," continued Arabella, "that there is no one so well versed as you in the knowledge of Oriental tongues or who can so easily decipher mysterious hieroglyphs, acquaintance with which is confined to the most sagacious and erudite."

"I may say without vanity that I know Chinese as well as any man in France. Have you read my treatise on Manchoo punctuation?"

"No," replied Arabella.

"Have you, Miss?" said the scholar, turning towards Musidora.

"I have glanced through it," she said, with difficulty repressing a wish to laugh. "It is a very learned piece of work which does honour to the age which has produced it."

"So," replied the scholar, puffed up with pride and showing off in his vanity, "you share my opinion as to the position of the tonic accent?"

"Completely," replied Musidora; "but that is not what we have come about."

"True," said the scholar. "How can I serve you, ladies? I shall do anything in the world to be agreeable to such charming persons as you."

"Well," said Musidora, presenting to the scholar the pocket-book which she had under her mantle, "if it is not trespassing too much on your kindness and your knowledge, we should like to have a translation of these two papers."

The scholar took the two papers which Musidora

held out, and said, with an air of great wisdom, "This is genuine Japan paper, and this genuine papyrus."

Then he placed upon his venerable nose a majestic pair of spectacles, but he could not make out a word. He took no end of trouble, yet failed to read the writing.

"I am really sorry, ladies," he said, returning the pocket-book to Musidora. "That interlaced writing is absolutely undecipherable. All that I can tell you is that the characters are Chinese, and drawn by a very practised hand. You are aware that there are forty thousand signs in the Chinese alphabet, each of which corresponds to a word. Although I have worked all my life, I yet know the first twenty thousand only. It takes a native forty years to learn to read. No doubt the ideas contained in this letter are expressed in signs included in the last twenty thousand, which I have not yet learned. As for the other paper, it is Hindustani. Mr. C—— will translate that for you at sight."

Musidora and her companion withdrew very much disappointed. Their visit to Mr. C—— was fruitless also, for the very good reason that Mr. C—— had never known any other language than the Basque

dialect, which he taught to an artless German, the only pupil attending his course.

Mr. V—— had nothing Chinese about him but a screen and a couple of cups; on the other hand he spoke Low Breton fluently, and succeeded admirably in breeding goldfish. These two gentlemen were, for the matter of that, two very worthy people who had had the capital idea of inventing a language in order to teach it at the expense of the government.

While driving through a square, Arabella saw Indian jugglers performing tricks upon a wretched piece of carpet. They were throwing brass balls into the air, swallowing sword blades thirty inches long, eating tow, and blowing flames out of their noses like the dragons of fable.

"Musidora," said Arabella, "order your groom to call up one of these tanned rascals. Perhaps he knows more Hindustani than the professors in the Collège de France."

One of the jugglers, at the call of the groom, approached the carriage, turning on his hands and feet.

"Here, you fellow," said Arabella, "I will give you a louis if you can read this paper, which is written in Hindustani."

"Excuse me, madam, I come from Normandy. I am a Hindoo by profession, but I cannot read any language."

"Go to the devil!" said Musidora, throwing him five francs.

The sham Hindoo thanked her, made a magnificent somersault and joined his painted companions, while the carriage drove towards the Boulevard.

At the door of a bazaar, a young man with a golden yellow face, great eyes shining in his pale visage like monstrous black flowers, hooked nose, flat, bluish hair, — all the marks of the Asiatic race, in a word, — was seated in melancholy fashion behind a little table that bore two or three pounds of dates, half a dozen cocoa-nuts, and a pair of scales. It was impossible to see anything sadder, more evidently nostalgic, than that poor devil, who was all curled up in the pale sunshine. No doubt he was thinking of the green banks of the Hughli, of the great pagoda of Juggernauth, of the dances of the bayaderes in the baths and at the palace gates. He was lost in a vague Oriental reverie full of golden scintillations, impregnated with strange perfumes and resonant with joyous sounds; for he started like a man suddenly awakened when Musidora's

groom signed to him that the lady wished to speak to him.

He came up with his little stock in trade hung around his neck, and putting both hands to his head, made a deep bow to the two young women.

"Read me that," said Musidora, holding out the papyrus to him.

The fruit seller took the paper which had been held out to him, and read in strange and deep accents the writing that had puzzled the two scholars. Musidora trembled with curiosity.

"Excuse me, madam," said the merchant, wiping away a tear from his black eyes. "I am a rajah's son. Misfortunes which it would take too long to relate have reduced me to the condition in which you see me. For six years now I have not heard or read a word of my own tongue. It is the first piece of happiness which I have had for many a day. This papyrus contains a song in three stanzas; it is sung to a popular air in my country, and here is the meaning of the verses: —

"'The snow-white butterflies in flocks fly over the sea; lovely white butterflies, when shall I through the blue air take my way?

"'Know you, O fairest of the fair, my black-eyed bayadere? If their wings they had lent to me, tell me, — know you whither I would go?

"'Without taking a single kiss from the roses, through the valleys and the forests I would go to your half-closed lips, flower of my soul, and there I would lie.'"

Musidora gave her purse to the date merchant, who kissed her hand with the most profound adoration.

"I shall return to my country. May Bramah watch over you and load you with blessings!" said the dispossessed rajah.

Musidora, after dropping Arabella at her lover's, returned to her abode as wise as she had left it, — her brain excited by the most irritating curiosity, her heart upset by the beginning of real passion. She had no other means of finding whither Fortunio had gone. George, who seemed to know more about him than any one else, was as dumb as Harpocrates, the god of silence; and besides, he could not very well help Musidora to win her wager from him.

Fortunio! Fortunio! Do you wear on your finger the ring of Gyges which enabled him to become invisible?

VIII

THE next day a letter was brought to Musidora. It was sealed with a sort of Arabic talisman. Musidora did not recognise the writing, which was small, peculiar, and with complicated strokes and turns like foreign writing. She broke the seal and read as follows:

"*You graceful little Demon:*

"The remarkable skill with which you snatched my pocket-book does the highest honour to your society talents. I am sorry, my dear angel, that there were not a few thousand-franc notes in it to compensate you for the trouble you must have had in opening it. Your curiosity cannot have been greatly satisfied, — but how the devil could I foresee that you would steal my pocket-book on that particular evening? I cannot anticipate everything. If I had, I should have filled it with love letters, confidential notes, extracts from registers, visiting cards, and other information. The only thing I beg you to be careful of is the golden needle. Its point has been dipped in the venomous juice of the euphorbia. The smallest prick with it kills with lightning-like rapidity. That needle is a weapon more terrible than a pistol or a poniard, for it never fails.

"P. S. Have the stones which adorn the cover taken off. They are of some value. They are topazes that were given me by the Rajah of Serendib. They can be made into a

bracelet which will not look badly on your beautiful arm. My jeweller in ordinary is the famous B——. I beg you will not pay for the setting. I kiss your hands and feet.

"FORTUNIO."

IX

MUSIDORA is lying on her sofa. A wrapper of pink silk gros-grain is carelessly drawn in around her waist. Through a refinement of coquetry her legs are bare, and she wears two enamelled gold anklets which have a quaint and charming effect. Her pose would suggest to a painter the subject of a lovely sketch. Her little head, with its wealth of hair, rests upon a pile of cushions, her dainty feet are stretched upon another pile of cushions almost as high as her head, so that her body describes a voluptuous curve wondrously supple and graceful. In her hand she holds Fortunio's letter, which she has been contemplating for a quarter of an hour with the greatest attention, as if the form of the letters and the arrangement of the lines could reveal to her the secret which she seeks to penetrate.

Musidora is experiencing a feeling entirely novel for her, — she has desired something and has not obtained it. It is the first time in her life that she has met with an obstacle. Her amazement is at its height. She,

Musidora, so envied, so courted, so sought after, the queen of her elegant and joyous world, has made formal advances without meeting with the least success. What an amazing revolution! For one moment the thought of Fortunio filled her with indescribable anger, extraordinary vehemence of hatred, and she was within the breadth of one of her own soft, silky hairs of becoming his mortal enemy.

Fortunio's remarkable beauty saved him, — Musidora's anger could not stand against that marvellous perfection of form. The sweet, serene lines of the noble face stilled every evil feeling in the girl's heart, and she took to loving him with unparalleled violence, the full extent of which she did not herself suspect. If curiosity had not stirred up this nascent love, as does a wind passing over a half-lighted fire, it might perhaps have died out with the last vapours of the orgy. Had it been crowned with success, satiety would soon have followed it. But obstacle and desire had made of the spark a conflagration.

Musidora now had but one thought, — to meet Fortunio and make him love her. With this mingled the beginnings of jealousy. Whose was the tress of hair? Whose hand had given that flower preserved

so long? For whom were written the verses translated by the date-selling rajah?

"What am I worrying about?" said Musidora. "Fortunio has been back from India for three years."

Then a sudden thought flashed in her mind. She rang and Jacintha came in.

"Jacintha, tear the stones out of that pocket-book and take them to the jeweller B——, from the Marquis Fortunio. Tell him to mount them as a bracelet and try to make him talk about the marquis. I shall give you the pearl-gray dress you have been coveting."

Jacintha returned looking rather put out.

"Well?" said Musidora, sitting up.

"The jeweller says that the Marquis Fortunio often comes to his shop and brings him stones to be set; that he calls for them himself on the day named, and always pays cash; that he is an excellent lapidary and knows gems better even than he. He knows no more than that. — And shall I have the gray dress?" said Jacintha, rather troubled at the lack of success of her diplomacy.

"Yes; don't worry me, and leave me alone."

Jacintha withdrew. Musidora took to looking at her letter again. She enjoyed singular pleasure in

looking at the capricious signs traced by Fortunio's hands. She seemed to recognise in the note written to warn her of danger, a loving anxiety disguised under a playful form, and a secret need to think of her which was yet but vaguely felt. Perhaps even the poisoned needle was but a pretext and no more.

She dwelt for a few moments on this notion, which flattered her passion, but she soon perceived that her hope was illusory and that if Fortunio had felt the least desire for her there was not the smallest necessity for him to have recourse to such a subterfuge. She had too clearly betrayed her feelings for a man such as Fortunio to be mistaken in them. He had most carefully avoided any engagement and did not appear very eager to enter upon any intrigue. But how was she to explain this coldness in a young man whose eye flashed with such brilliant, magnetic splendour, and who bore all the outward signs of the most fiery passions? There must be in some corner of his heart an ideal, a poetic love soaring far above vulgar loves; all the strength of his soul must be absorbed by a unique and deep feeling which preserved his body from the seduction of the senses, since he had not been excited by coquetries which would have made the ashes

of Nestor and Priam move in their tomb, and melted the ice of Hippolytus himself.

"Ah!" said Musidora with a sigh. "He despises me. He looks upon me as impure, he does not want me." And Musidora cast over her past life a long, sombre glance. The golden beams which rayed her green eyes seemed to writhe like serpents, her velvety eyebrows were contracted, her nostrils swelled with a fierce emotion, and she bit her lower lip with her little teeth.

"How do I know what they have told him about me? That beast, that drunken George, who is only fit to empty full bottles, — no great talent, — will not have failed to say to him, with his unbearable chuckle: 'Ha, ha! he, he! Musidora, — oh, a delicious, an incomparable girl, the pearl of supper parties, the cynosure of all feasts, the bouquet of all balls! She is very fashionable, on my word, and you will be right to take her. It is quite the proper thing to show her at the opera and at the races. For my part, I had her for three months. Any well-bred young fellow owes that to himself. Musidora is a power in her way, a great authority on all matters of elegance. If it occurred to her to-morrow to take for a lover a country lout with

thread gloves and laced boots, to-morrow the laced boots of the country lout would be considered patent leather, and many people would order similar ones.' I can hear him say it, and I am sure I have not misstated a word. Alfred, that other fool, always stuck in his cravat, his arms pinned in his sleeves, — what stupid jokes will he not have made about me, with his idiotic smile? And de Marcilly? And all of them? I wish I could trample them under foot and spit in their faces with contempt, for it is they who have made me what I am.

"Perhaps they have told Fortunio of my wager. If at least your dapple-gray horses had the sense to run away and break your neck, George! But it is quite useless for me to be angry with George. Fortunio does not need his indiscretions to guess what I am and to see my life at a glance. George is right, — I am a delightful, an incomparable girl!"

"No," said she, after a moment of silence, "I am an honest woman. I am in love."

She rose, kissed Fortunio's letter, pressed it to her heart, and denied herself to everybody.

X

The menagerie of lions and tigers is beginning to worry about Musidora. No one knows what to think. She is not to be seen anywhere. Alfred, who is everywhere at the same time and seems to have the gift of ubiquity, has not met her once in a fortnight. The dogs are off the scent, and, baying, they travel along the promenade with their noses to the ground, looking for her track. A concert, a ball, a first performance of a play have been given, and she has not appeared at any one of them. No one has caught a glimpse of her. Gone to the country? That cannot be, for it is not yet the season. De Marcilly claims that she has some love affair in an attic with a commercial traveller; George maintains that she has had herself carried off by the Turkish ambassador; Alfred is satisfied with affirming that it is strange, very strange, excessively strange, — a stereotyped phrase which he calls to his help whenever he does not know what to think.

The truth of the matter is that for a fortnight Musidora has been invisible. Her house looks uninhabited and dead; the blinds are carefully closed; no one is

seen going in or coming out; scarcely does a valet with quiet, discreet face, step in on tip-toe through a door half-opened and immediately closed. At night the windows, usually so brilliant, no longer blaze with light from the chandeliers and tapers. A pale gleam of light, dimmed by thick curtains, quivers forlorn at the corner of a pane. It is the only sign of life visible on the black face of the dwelling.

At last George, bored by the absence of his favourite, said to himself one evening, on leaving the Opera, "I must absolutely find out what has become of Musidora. I am willing to show at the Bois de Boulogne on a hired hack, to wear boots blacked with eggs, to do the most humiliating things, if I do not succeed in forcing my way in."

Whereupon he proceeded to Musidora's abode.

A porter, who had received the most formal orders not to admit any one, endeavoured to prevent George passing.

"Look here, you rascal," said George, striking him across the face with his rhinoceros-horn stick; "do you take me for Baron de B——?" And he continued on his way with a deliberate step.

He reached without difficulty the first drawing-room,

where he found Jacintha, whom forthwith he kissed; then, turning the handle of a little door which he seemed to be well acquainted with, he entered Musidora's room. He stopped for a few moments without speaking, and glanced around to see where she might be.

The small Etruscan lamp alone was lighted, and cast a beam barely sufficient to enable objects to be seen. When his eyes had become accustomed to the weak light, he perceived Musidora stretched flat on the floor, her head leaning on her hand, her two breasts crushing the thick pile of the carpet, in an attitude exactly recalling that of Correggio's Magdalen. Two locks of her uncurled hair fell to the ground and gracefully set off the melancholy expression of her face. Her brow alone was lighted. If she had not been twisting an aloe-fibre shoe on the end of one of her feet cocked in the air, she might have been mistaken for a statue.

"Musidora," said George, in a tone buffoonly paternal, "your conduct is amazing, scandalous, extraordinary! The strangest and most ridiculous reports are current about you in society. You are compromising yourself in horrible fashion, and if you do not take care, you will lose your character."

"Ah! that is you, George, is it?" said Musidora, as if emerging from a dream.

"Yes, my infanta, it is I, your sincere and faithful friend, the sworn admirer of your charms, your cavalier, your troubadour, your Romeo."

"George, you have managed to be more drunk even than usual. How did you do it?"

"I! Musidora, I am funereally grave. Alas! wine no longer intoxicates me. But that is not the question. I am told, Musidora, though I dare scarcely repeat it, that you are seriously in love, — in love like a shop-girl!"

"Indeed, is that what they say?" said Musidora, pushing back behind her ears the waves of hair which fell over her cheeks.

"They also say that you have turned religious, and that you intend to be a modern Magdalen — I don't know, — endless absurd reports. But what is certain is that we do not know what to do since you took it into your head to remove your star from our heaven. Musidora, we miss you terribly. For my own part, I am bored like a patriarch, and the other day, for the sake of distraction, I was obliged to quarrel with Beppo, whom I unfortunately killed, so that I have no one

left as good as I am to play chess with me. You are also the cause of my having foundered my English mare at the steeple-chase at Bièvre; for I thought I saw you in a carriage on the other side of a wall, which I made poor Belle leap, and cut her open on a piece of glass at the top. Alfred, who has finally left Cynthia to take his place among your admirers, has been reduced to such a state of brutishness by your disappearance that he actually went to the Tuileries with dirty gloves and the same stick as the night before. Such is the brief but touching account of the innumerable calamities produced by your retreat. You are too beautiful, my dear, to cloister yourself in such fashion. Beauty, like the sun, is bound to shine for everybody. There are so few beautiful women that the government ought to force every person convicted of being notoriously beautiful to show herself at least thrice a week on her balcony, so that people should not wholly lose feeling for form and elegance. It would be a great deal better than to scatter stereotyped Bibles in peasants' huts, or to found schools after the Lancastrian method; — but I do not know what the government is thinking of. Are you aware, queenlet, that since you are no longer there to harass us with the

barbed arrows of your jokes, we dress like poor devils who have received an unexpected inheritance, who have been invited in the morning to a ball the same night, and who have gone to buy ready-made clothing in some Palais-Royal shop? Cannot you see for yourself that my waistcoat is too broad by a finger-breadth, and that the right end of my cravat is much longer than the left, evident signs of great perturbation of mind?"

"I am profoundly touched by your deep grief," said Musidora, with an arch smile; "indeed, I did not suppose that I was capable of causing so great a void on disappearing from the world. But I need solitude, the least noise afflicts me, everything worries and tires me."

"I understand," said George. "You would like to know if my new coat looks well from behind. I am importunate. If you were expecting somebody, I am quite sure it was not I. Never mind, I have risked being uncivil for once, and I shall not make use of the only means I have of being agreeable, — that is, going away." And as he finished his remark, he sat down quietly on the floor by Musidora's side.

"Why, you have got a pretty bracelet!" he said, lifting her arm.

"Fie!" answered Musidora with a disdainful pout.

"Are you reduced to Tartuffe's expedient, and do you need to speak of my bracelet in order to touch my arm?"

"They are topazes of admirable water and purity," continued George. "It is B—— who set those. He is the only one that can do that kind of work. Who is the Amadis, the Prince Galaor, the charming conqueror who has given it to you? He must be very jealous to keep you shut up and walled in as the Turkish Sultan does with his favourite odalisque."

"It is Fortunio," replied Musidora.

"Oh!" said George, "Fortunio! When am I to send you the carriage and horses? I am not surprised now at your disappearance. Well, you have turned your time to good account. You asked for six weeks, and it has taken you a fortnight only to penetrate a mystery which has baffled our sagacity for three years. That is very good! I shall give you a powdered coachman and two grooms into the bargain. I hope that you will now drive us in the carriage which you have so cleverly won, to the royal residence of that sly fox who has always thrown us off the scent."

"I have not seen Fortunio since the night of the supper," replied Musidora with a sigh, "and I know

no more than you do, George, whither his caprice has taken him, — I do not even know whether he is in France. These stones came from the pocket-book which I took from him, as you know. They adorned the covers. Inside I found only a Chinese letter and a Malay song. Fortunio, finding that I had taken his pocket-book, wrote me a mocking letter in which he asked me to have a bracelet made of the topazes; — and that is all. Since then I have had no news of him. Perhaps he has gone to join the Chinese princess."

"That he has not done, little one, for I have twice caught sight of him at the Bois de Boulogne: the first time in the Madrid Drive, the other, at the Maillot Gate. He was riding a devil of a black horse with a long tail and a long mane, of the fiercest look, and was going like a cannon ball. I had not yet killed Belle, and you know at what a pace she could go, but by the side of Fortunio's hippogriff, she was, — for all that concerns the poor brute must now be put in the past tense, — a snail crawling over a stone covered with crushed sugar. Behind Fortunio galloped a little monster with a brown face, eyes bigger than his head, thick lips and flat hair, and dressed in the most eccentric fashion in the world, — a nightmare riding a whirl-

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wind, for the whirlwind alone can go at such a pace. That is all I can tell you about Fortunio. Of course, as you say, he may be in China."

In all George's talk, Musidora had heard but one thing, — that Fortunio might be met in the Bois de Boulogne. A flash of hope lighted her green eyes, and she addressed George in more friendly fashion.

"I will give you another month," said George, kissing her hand. "Under other circumstances, I should have thrust myself on your hospitality; but we are now a girl of principles. Farewell, my infanta, my princess; dream rose-coloured and mother-of-pearl dreams. If I can come across my Lord Fortunio, although it may cost me four horses, I shall send him to you."

With which fine peroration, George went out, not without kissing Jacintha, as he had done on entering.

XI

Musidora awoke more joyous than usual. She had her mirror brought, and thought herself pretty, — somewhat pale, her eyes a little heavy, just enough to make her beauty delicately interesting. She said to herself, "If Fortunio could see me thus, I should be quite sure of victory."

Indeed, she was irresistible. But how are you going to overcome an enemy that flees and refuses to fight?

The weather was rather fine for the season. A few bits of blue showed among the clouds, the wind had dried the roads. Musidora, usually very indifferent to the changes of the weather, and who had not many opportunities of ascertaining whether it was rainy or fine, felt extreme joy at the beauty of the day. She ran through the house with extraordinary vivacity, looking at all the clocks to see what was the time, and at all the vanes to see which way the wind was.

Jacintha, her faithful maid, helped her to put on an elegant sky-blue riding habit, a beaver hat with a green veil; a riding whip from Verdier's and a neatly turned boot, — nothing was wanting. Musidora in that costume had a charmingly resolute and victorious air. Her curls, held in by a light net to resist the action of the wind, fell gracefully down her cheeks; her figure, set off by the close-fitting waist of her habit, showed supple and slight above the ample, rich folds of the skirt; her foot, naturally so tiny, became imperceptible, imprisoned as it was in the small boot.

Jack announced that her ladyship's mare was saddled and bridled, whereupon Musidora went down to the

yard, and, Jack holding her stirrup, she sprang into the saddle with consummate lightness and skill. Then she touched her animal with the whip and went off like a flash. Jack galloped behind her and had the greatest difficulty in keeping up with her.

The long avenue of the Champs-Élysées was soon traversed. Musidora's mare had not been exercised for some time, and dashed forward impatiently. Although she was going at full speed, her mistress gave her her head and whipped her up. Musidora evidently had a presentiment that she would meet Fortunio that day. The mare, thus urged, galloped even faster, and seemed no longer to touch the ground. The passers-by were amazed at the boldness of the young woman. Sometimes a cry of terror broke from a carriage in which a frightened duchess threw herself back as she turned her head not to see the imprudent rider fall and be dashed to pieces; but Musidora was an excellent horsewoman, and sat her mare as if she were made fast to the saddle.

At the Maillot Gate she met Alfred, who was returning towards Paris. Alfred, surprised, attempted to swing his horse around and to gallop after her in order to declare his love and beg for relief to his sorrows, but

he did not perform the movement very skilfully, lost a stirrup, and before he had regained his seat, Musidora was out of sight.

"The devil take it!" said he, bringing his horse to a walk, "there is a great chance lost. I shall wait for her at this gate, for it is probable that she will come out this way."

And, for fear of missing her, Alfred stood sentry at the Maillot Gate as motionless as a carbineer on sentry before the Triumphal Arch of the Carrousel.

The Bois de Boulogne was still leafless; scarcely a few blades of green grass showed on the detritus of the last season's leaves; the red stems, sticky with sap, opened like the frames of umbrellas or fans from which the silk had been torn. Although there was no sun, the roads were already as dusty as after a hot summer. The Bois de Boulogne was as ugly as a fashionable wood can be, which is saying not a little.

Musidora, not much inclined by nature to pastoral woods, cared very little for the beauty of the prospect. That was not what had brought her to the Bois. She traversed every drive, particularly the Madrid Drive where George had met Fortunio, but in vain.

"What is the matter with Musidora?" said a young fellow who saw her passing by at full speed like a shadow carried away by the wind. "She is riding madly and leaping the barriers at the risk of breaking her neck. Is she trying to become a circus rider or a jockey? What mania has suddenly seized upon her?"

Once Musidora thought she saw Fortunio at the corner of a road. She dashed off in pursuit of him with renewed whipping and spurring. Her mare, maddened, reared, lashed out twice or thrice, and went off at score. The veins stood out upon her smoking, muscular neck, her flanks were heaving, foam flecked her bridle, and her speed was so great that her mane and tail stood out straight.

"Musidora!" cried George, who was riding in the opposite direction, "you will break your mare's wind."

The girl paid no attention, but continued her mad gallop. She was wonderfully beautiful. The speed at which she went had brought the roses to her cheeks, her eyes flashed, her fair, loosened hair flew behind, her heaving breast rose and fell, she breathed in strongly through her nostrils, holding her lips tightly closed so as not to be suffocated by the wind, her veil unrolled along her back in waving folds that gave her a trans-

parent and ethereal aspect. Bradamante or Marphisa, the two lovely warriors, never looked prouder and more resolute on horseback.

Alas! it was not Fortunio; it was a very good-looking young fellow, who was much surprised to see a young woman dash at him at full speed and suddenly turn round without a word. Musidora, exceedingly disappointed, again met George, who was riding quietly along like a village priest mounted upon an ass.

"George," she said, "take me home. I have lost my groom."

George rode by her side, and they went out together by the Auteuil Gate.

"Why!" said de Marcilly, "it looks as if dear George had taken on Musidora again."

"I think they never quite broke off," answered his comrade.

"I must tell that to the Duchess of M——," said de Marcilly, "she will lead George a fine life. What amazing stuff he will have to talk in order to get back into her good books!" And the two rode down another drive.

As for Alfred, whose nose, irritated by a sharp wind, was visibly getting redder, when he saw the mist rise

on the horizon and the night coming on apace, he made a very judicious remark which ought to have occurred to him two hours earlier: "Why! it looks as if Musidora had gone out by another gate. That girl is really too capricious. I shall make up my mind to pay court to Phœbe; she has a very much better disposition."

Whereupon he spurred his horse, and got comfortably drunk that evening at the Café de Paris by way of consoling himself for his disappointment.

XII

The lovely girl returned home, worn out, almost discouraged, and sadder than a professional gambler who has been refused twenty francs by his intimate friend in order to go back to the card-room. She threw herself on a sofa, and while Jacintha was unlacing her boots and undoing her dress, she began to weep bitterly, shedding the first tears which had ever moistened her sparkling eye, with its clear, cold glance, sharp and cutting like a dagger. When her mother died, she had not wept. It is true that her mother had sold her at the age of thirteen to an old English nobleman, and

that she beat her to get her money out of her; these facts had somewhat tempered in Musidora the impulses of filial love. She had seen carried away upon a stretcher the blood-stained body of young Willis, who had blown out his brains in despair at being unable to satisfy her extravagant wants, and she had not exhibited a trace of emotion. But she wept at not having met Fortunio. Her icy heart, colder and more barren than a Siberian winter, was at last melting under the warm breath of love and dissolving in a sweet shower of tears. These tears were her baptism into a new life.

There are diamond-like natures coldly brilliant and unnaturally hard. Nothing affects them; no fire can melt, no acid dissolve them; nothing can grind them down; they tear with their sharp corners the weak and loving souls they meet on their way. The world charges them with being barbarous and cruel, but they merely obey a fatal law which requires that of two bodies which come in contact, the harder shall wear and cut the other. Why should a diamond cut diamond, and glass not cut diamond? There is the whole question in a nutshell. Is it fair to accuse the diamond of being insensible?

Musidora's nature was of that kind. She had lived indifferent and calm amidst disorder; she had plunged into shame like a diver in his bell, who sees turning round him the monstrous polyps and the hungry sharks that cannot reach him; her real existence was entirely separate from the one that went on outside it. Often it seemed to her that another woman who, by a curious accident, happened to have her name and figure, had done everything that she was charged with.

But let there turn up a soul of equal strength and power of resistance, and suddenly the angles are cut away, facets are formed, a monogram is engraved ineffaceably: diamond alone can cut diamond. Fortunio had succeeded in raying the hard armour of Musidora and in drawing his own image upon the metal which had resisted *aqua fortis* and the graver. The statue had become a woman. So in the fabulous days of antiquity, a young goatherd, endowed by Venus with resistless beauty, caused to spring from the hard and knotty heart of an oak a nymph smiling in all the splendour of her fair nudity.

Musidora feels a new soul blooming in her like a mysterious flower sown by Fortunio on the barren rock of her heart. Her love is full of the divine puer-

ilities, of all the adorable childishness of pure, virgin passion. Musidora is, in truth, an innocent girl, who would blush at a word and tremble under a too burning glance. It is quite sincerely that she wears on her dear little heart the letter of the beloved Fortunio, that she goes to bed with it and kisses it twenty times a day. You may be quite sure that if the daisies were in bloom, she would pick the petals of one, saying, "He loves me a little, very much, not at all," like the artless Marguerite in Martha's garden.

Who has dared to say that there was in the world a certain Musidora, haughty, proud, capricious, depraved, venomous as a scorpion, and so wicked that people glanced under her dress to see if she did not have a cloven foot; a soulless, pitiless, remorseless Musidora, who deceived even her chosen lover; a vampire thirsting for gold and silver, drinking up the inheritance of eldest sons like a glass of soda water by way of appetiser; a mocking fiend, laughing discordantly at everything; a vile courtesan renewing the orgies of antiquity, without even having for excuse the ardours of Messalina?

Those who say these things are unquestionably in error. I do not know that Musidora, and I doubt

whether she ever existed. Besides, I would not have taken so abominable a creature for my heroine. Scandal must not be believed. Men are so wicked that they manage to slander Tiberius and Nero.

The Musidora I know is softer and whiter than milk, a month-old lamb is not more candid; the scent of the early strawberries is less suave and spring-like than the perfume of her newly opened soul. In her young dreams she wanders innocently upon tender green meads by flowery hawthorn hedges; her sole desire is to inhabit a humble cabin by the bank of a limpid stream and to live in eternal solitude with her beloved. What girl of fifteen who has never been away from her mother's protection, could wish for chaster and simpler happiness? Nothing but her heart, without any accompaniment of Emir-green Thibet shawls, of sorrel horses, gems from Provost's, and a box at the Bouffes. *O sancta simplicitas!* as John Huss said on ascending the pile.

Yet this dream, so commonplace and apparently so easy of realisation, does not strike me as likely to come true very soon. Shall we have the luck to meet Fortunio at the Bois de Boulogne? It is doubtful, yet I have no other means of continuing my novel.

The Italian birds have fled from their gilded cage, so I must give up thinking of bringing Fortunio and Musidora together at a performance of "Anna Bolena" or "Don Giovanni." Fortunio does not go often to the Opera, and I do not want to upset my dear hero's habits. Meanwhile I keep supplied with Havana cigars a young fellow who is a friend of mine and who is mounting guard on the Boulevard de Gand watching for Fortunio, who sometimes walks there with his friend de Marcilly.

I had thought of making Musidora go back to the Madrid Drive and making her catch sight of Fortunio galloping at full speed. She would have rushed in pursuit of him, and her mare, shying at a branch, would have thrown her violently to the ground. Fortunio would have picked her up in a faint and taken her home, and could not in decency have helped coming to inquire after the invalid. Then would have come Musidora's confession, the emotion of the shy Fortunio, and the inevitable consequences. But this plan is worn out. In every novel you see nothing but women pursued by mad bulls, carriages stopped on the brink of a precipice, horses rearing and a stranger seizing their bridle, and no end of other fine inven-

tions of the kind. Besides, when you are thrown from your horse, it is quite natural that you should break your shoulder bone, punch a hole in your head, smash your teeth or your nose; and I confess that I have taken too much pains to make Musidora a very pretty creature to run any risk of thus damaging her fine polished shoulders, her delicately shaped nose, her clean, well set teeth as white as those of a Newfoundland dog, in favour of which I have used up all that I possess in the way of crystalline comparisons. Do you think it would be pleasant to see that silky, fair hair turned into stiff, straight wisps full of coagulated blood? Perhaps it would be necessary to cut it off in order to dress the wound; I could not bear such a monstrosity as my heroine with her head shaved. It would be quite impossible for me to continue a story in which the heroine's head should be dressed Titus fashion; and I ask you, ladies, if anything could be more hateful than a princess in a novel who should look like a little boy.

It is a pretty hard task which I have undertaken. How the devil should I know what Fortunio is doing? There is no reason why I should know it any better than you. I have seen Fortunio but once, at supper, and the unfortunate idea came into my head to take

him for my hero, believing that such a good-looking young fellow could not fail to have many romantic adventures. The ready welcome he received at every one's hands, the mysterious interest attached to his person, certain strange words which he had let fall between a smile and a toast had singularly predisposed me in his favour. Fortunio, you have deceived me! I expected merely to have to write at your dictation a marvellous story full of surprising incidents. On the contrary, I have got to invent everything, to rack my brains, to make my readers have patience until you are ready to present yourself and bow to the company. I have made you handsome, witty, generous, a millionaire, mysterious, noble, well-shod, with handsome neckties, — all rare and precious gifts. If you had had a fairy godmother, you could not have been better off. And how many pages have you given me in return, you ungrateful Fortunio? Not more than a dozen. O Hyrcanian ferocity! O unparalleled callousness! A dozen pages in return for twenty-four perfections! It is scant.

In order to fill up the space which you should have filled up alone, poor Musidora has had to mourn beyond measure, George to get as drunk as innumerable

lords, Alfred to utter a greater number of stupidities than usual, Cynthia to show her back and breasts, Phœbe her legs, and Arabella her dress. If I have been improper in introducing my reader into Musidora's bathroom, because I did not know where else to take him, you alone are the cause of it. You have compelled me to spin out my description and to go counter to Horace's precept, *semper ad eventum festina*. If my novel is poor, it is your fault. May it weigh lightly upon you! I have spelled the words as well as I could, and hunted out in the dictionary those I was not sure of. You who were my hero, you ought to have furnished me with incredible events, Platonic and other passions, duels, elopements, dagger-thrusts. It was in return for this that I provided you with all possible qualities. If you go on in this way, my dear Fortunio, I shall have to say that you are ugly, a fool, commonplace, without a sou to your name. I cannot go and look for you at the street corners like a betrayed woman who waits in the pouring rain to see her faithless lover come forth from his new mistress's house, and catch hold of him by the tail of his coat. If you had a janitor, I could go and ask your story of him, but you have not one, since you have not a

house, and consequently have not a door. O Calliope, Muse of the brazen trump, sustain my breath! What the devil am I to say in the next chapter? I have nothing left to do but to put Musidora to death. Do you see, Fortunio, to what extremities you have reduced me? I created a pretty woman to be your mistress, and I am compelled to kill her at page 127 contrary to custom, which does not permit the bubble swollen with love sighs and called heroine of a novel, to be pricked until page 216 or thereabouts.

XIII

The days passed, and Fortunio did not show up. Musidora's quest had been utterly fruitless. Arabella's remark, "Fortunio is not a man, he is a dream," recurred to her memory. And indeed, once seen, he was so handsome that it was easy to believe him a supernatural vision. The noisy brilliancy in the midst of which he had appeared to Musidora greatly helped out this poetic illusion, and sometimes she doubted its reality; as some one might who had seen heaven open for a moment and afterwards, finding it inexorably closed, had come to believe himself the dupe of a hallucination due to fever.

Her familiar friends brought her perfidious consolation, with airs of ironical condolence and faces that were joyously sad. Cynthia advised her, with all the generous sincerity of her kindly heart, to take another lover, because that would always occupy her a little; but Musidora replied that this remedy, which might do for Phœbe or Arabella, was in no wise suited to her. Then Cynthia kissed her tenderly on the forehead, and withdrew, saying, "*Povera innamorata!* I shall have a novena said to the Madonna for the success of your love."

And this she did religiously.

Musidora, seeing that every gleam of hope had died out and that Fortunio was more lost than ever, became thoroughly disgusted with life and turned over in her lovely head the most sinister projects. Like a courageous girl, she resolved not to survive her first love.

"At least," she said to herself, "since I have seen the man I was to love, I will not be low enough to permit any other to touch my dress with the tip of his finger. I am now consecrated. Ah! if I could only take back and suppress my life! If I could only strike out from the number of my days all that have not been devoted to you, dear and mys-

terious Fortunio! I had a vague presentiment that you existed somewhere, sweet and proud, witty and beautiful, a lightning gleam in your calm eyes, an indulgent smile on your divine lips, like an angel come down to live among men. Once I saw you, my whole heart went out to you; with a single glance you seized upon my soul; I felt that I belonged to you, and I recognised in you my master and my conqueror. I understood that it would be impossible for me ever to love any one else than you, and that the centre of my life was forever displaced. I am punished for not waiting for you, but now I know that you exist. You are no phantom; you are not merely a charming image evoked in my heated brain by my hot heart. I have heard you, seen you, touched you; I have done my best to find you, to cast myself at your feet, to beseech you to forgive me and to love me a little. You have escaped from me like an evanescent shadow, — all that is left me is to die. To know that you are not a dream and to go on living is impossible."

Musidora turned over in her mind ever so many ways of committing suicide. First she thought of drowning herself, but the Seine was very yellow and muddy; then the thought of being fished out of the

Saint-Cloud nets and stretched naked upon the black, sticky slabs of the Morgue proved singularly repugnant to her. For a moment she thought of blowing out her brains, but she had not a pistol, and besides, no woman cares to disfigure herself, even after death. She has a certain funereal vanity; she wants to be a presentable corpse.

She rather fancied a knife-thrust in the heart, but she was afraid of recoiling at the touch of steel and of not striking firmly enough. She wished to kill herself in real earnest and not merely to make an interesting wound.

Finally she settled on poison. I may assure my readers that the commonplace and inelegant idea of asphyxiating herself with a brazier of lighted charcoal did not occur to my heroine. She knew too well how to live, to go and die in that fashion. Suddenly a thought flashed into her brain; she recalled Fortunio's needle.

"I shall prick my breast with the needle, and that will be the end of it. Death will be sweet since it will come from Fortunio," said she, as she drew the needle from one of the divisions of the pocket-book. She carefully looked at the sharp point, dulled by a

sort of reddish coating, and placed it upon a table by her side. Then she put on a wrapper of white muslin, fastened a white rose in her hair, and stretched herself out on the sofa, after having first drawn aside the folds of her dress and brought out her round, white breast, in order to prick it more readily. She was certainly resolved to kill herself, but I am bound to confess that she did not hurry the preparations. Some vague and secret hope still kept her back.

"I shall prick myself at sharp noon," she said to herself.

It was then a quarter to twelve. Whatever may be the explanation of the strange caprice, it is certain that Musidora would have been very sorry to die at a quarter to twelve.

While Time dropped in his hourglass the sands of the fatal quarter of an hour, a thought occurred to Musidora: Did that poison cause much suffering before death? Did it leave on the body red or black spots? She would have liked to see its effects. In the days of Cleopatra, in the days of antiquity, there would have been no difficulty about the matter. She would have sent for five or six male or female slaves and tried the poison on them; she would have

performed what the doctors call an experiment *in anima vili*. A dozen poor wretches would have writhed like eels cut to pieces on the handsome porphyry pavement and the brilliant mosaics, while their mistress, leaning carelessly upon the shoulder of a young Asiatic child, watched with her velvet glance their last agonising spasm. Everything has degenerated nowadays, and the prodigious life of that gigantic world is no longer understood by us. Our virtues and our crimes are shapeless.

Having no slaves on whom she could try her needle, Musidora, very much perplexed, held it in her fingers three inches from her breast, envying Cleopatra's fate, who at least had seen, before she yielded her life to the venomous kiss of the asp, what she would have to suffer to join her dear Anthony.

Just as Musidora was plunged in this maze of uncertainty, her English cat emerged from below a piece of furniture and came to her with soft purring. Seeing that her mistress did not pay any attention to her advances, she sprang into her lap and moved her hand with her little, cold, pink nose. She arched her back as she looked at her mistress with round eyes cut by a pupil in the shape of a capital I, and expressed her

pleasure at being caressed by the soft purring peculiar to cats and to tigers.

A devilish idea occurred to Musidora, as she petted the cat. She pricked its head with the needle. The cat leaped up, sprang to the floor, made two or three attempts to walk, then fell as if seized with vertigo; its sides heaved, its tail faintly beat the floor, a shudder ran through its body; its eyes filled with a greenish gleam and then died out. It was dead. The whole thing had lasted scarcely a few seconds.

"That is good," said Musidora; "evidently one does not suffer much;" and she put the needle to her breast.

She was just about to scratch her white skin with it, when the low rumble of a carriage passing at full gallop under the gateway reached her ear, and for a moment delayed the carrying out of her project. She rose and looked out of the window.

A carriage, to which were harnessed four dapple-gray horses so absolutely alike and so thorough-bred that they would have been taken for Arab horses of the Prophet's breed, was just then passing round the sanded court. The postilions wore pale-green jackets with Musidora's colours. There was no one in the carriage.

Musidora did not know what to make of it, when Jacintha handed her a note which had been given her by one of the postilions. Its contents were as follows:

"*Madam:*

"My shy ways have made you lose a carriage, which is not right. This one is better than George's. Pray accept it in exchange. If you should desire to try it, the Neuilly Road is a very fine one, and you could try your horses' speed. I should be happy to meet you there.

"FORTUNIO."

XIV

IT is easy to imagine the delighted amazement of Musidora. She passed suddenly and without any transition from the deepest depression to the liveliest joy. Fortunio, who had fled, who was not to be found, who was so shy, surrendered of his own accord at the very moment when she least expected it. The triumphal clarions sounded already joyously in Musidora's ear, for she no longer doubted that she was victorious, and felt sure that she would storm Fortunio's heart without striking a blow. O ever up-springing hope, how obstinately you raise your elastic and supple branches bent under the heavy tread of disappointment, and how little time do you need to bloom into graceful flowers

and to send out vigorous branches in every direction! Here is a girl who but a moment since was paler than the alabaster statue that would have been placed upon her tomb and whose blue veins seemed to mark marble rather than living flesh, and she now skips through the room singing as joyously as a sparrow in the month of May.

"Jacintha, Jacintha! Quick! Dress me, put on my shoes, — I am going out."

"What dress will you wear, madam?" replied Jacintha, weighing each word to give her time to reflect.

"Any one," said the girl, with a charmingly impatient gesture, "and please be quick. You are slower than a tortoise. One would think you carried a shell on your back."

Jacintha brought a white dress with narrow, very pale rose stripes which gave it a delicate flesh tint, something like that of the hortensia bursting into bloom. Musidora put it on without a corset, so eager was she to go. Besides, she ran no risk in doing so, for she was one of the very few women who do not fall to pieces when they are undressed. Then she wrapped herself in a great white cashmere which came down to her heels, and Jacintha placed delicately on her head

the freshest, most graceful, most delightfully coquettish bonnet imaginable. I dare not describe in vile prose such a masterpiece. Be satisfied, ladies, with knowing that the brim, which was not very broad, was lined with an airy garland of little wild-flowers which formed around Musidora's lovely face a charming aureole for which more than one saint would willingly have exchanged her golden nimbus. Imagine a great camellia with an angel's face for a heart! Her small shoes, like the wing of a scarabæus, so cut away that they scarcely covered the toes, showed under the hem of her dress and readily suggested that they covered feet belonging to the prettiest legs in the world. Excessively fine stockings showed through their open-worked embroidery the rose-flushed skin of the adorable feet.

Musidora scarcely took time to put on her gloves, went downstairs and got into the carriage.

"To Neuilly!" she said to the groom who put up the steps. The carriage went off like a flash.

"Why!" said Jacintha, stumbling against the body of the cat, which she had not yet perceived, "Blanchette is dead! Here, Jack, look at your brute. It is dead. Your mistress will make a fine row about it tonight when she comes home."

Jack, terrified, knelt down by the cat, pulled its tail, pinched its ears, rubbed its nose with a handkerchief dipped in cologne, but alas! all in vain.

"Oh, the wicked brute! it died on purpose to have me beaten by my mistress," said the negro boy, rolling his eyes with an air of comical terror; "and her hand is so heavy!"

"Hold your tongue, you fool! Do you suppose that Madam would lower herself to beat you? She will have you whipped by Zamora," replied Jacintha, majestically. "And to tell the truth, you thoroughly deserve it. You have only a cat to look after, and you let it die like a dog, — poor little thing!"

"Oh, oh!" cried the little negro, as if he already felt upon his shoulders the shower of blows which was reserved for him.

"You can howl by and by," said Jacintha, who took pleasure in increasing the negro's terror; "you know that Zamora detests you, and he has a strong arm. He will flay you alive like an eel; you can reckon on that, Master Jack."

Jack picked up the cat, carried it to its cradle, bent its four paws under it, arranged its tail in a circle, opened its eyes so as to give it an appearance of life,

then hid himself in a hay-loft behind a pile of hay until the storm should have passed, taking care to put in his pockets a bottle of wine, bread, and a piece of cold meat.

Since I am talking about the cat, let me clear Musidora of the charge of cruelty which may be brought against her for having killed her favourite pet. Musidora thought that she was going to die herself, and that perhaps the cat, after her death, would be reduced to travelling on the roofs in snow and rain, exposed to the horrors of famine; a most afflicting prospect. She was cruel through kindness. Besides, she has had it very nicely stuffed and placed under a glass edged with red plush. It lies upon a little sky-blue pillow, and its beautiful enamelled eyes are green, exactly as if it were alive. You could almost swear you heard it purring. Which of us can hope to be stuffed and put under glass after death? Which of us will ever be regretted as much as a long-haired cat or a trained dog?

XV

THE postilions in their pale-green jackets cracked their whips joyously, and the carriage went at such a pace that the wheels looked like a shining disc, the

spokes of which could not be made out. The dust they raised had not time to settle before the carriage was already out of sight. The best-driven equipages were left behind, and yet the dapple-gray horses had not turned a hair. Their fine thoroughbred legs travelled rapidly over the road which fled past them gray and rayed like a ribbon that is being rolled up.

Musidora, carelessly leaning back upon the cushions, indulged in the most amorous anticipations. Her bright complexion was illumined with happiness, and her little hand, encased in a white glove, and resting on the edge of the carriage, beat time to an air which she hummed to herself. Her delight was so great that from time to time she burst out laughing spasmodically and almost feverishly; she felt as if she must shout, leap out and run as fast as she could, or do something equally violent in order to let off steam. All her languor had vanished. The girl who yesterday had to be carried to her bath, who could scarcely lift her feet to ascend the stairs, would now have thought nothing of performing the twelve labours of Hercules. Curiosity, desire, and love, the three terrible levers, any one of which could move the world, excited the faculties of

her soul to their highest pitch. Every fibre in her being was stretched to breaking and vibrated like the chords of a lyre.

She was about to see Fortunio, to hear him, to speak to him, to feed on the divine food of his beauty, to suspend her soul to his lips, to drink in each of his words, more precious than the diamonds which fall from the mouth of the virtuous maidens in Perrault's Tales. Ah! to breathe the air which he breathed, to be caressed by the same sunbeam that played on his black hair, to look at a tree or a prospect on which his glance had rested, to have something in common with him, meant ineffable enjoyment, a world of secret ecstasy. At the thought Musidora's heart leaped in her breast.

The dandies set off at a gallop to see the face of the unknown duchess drawn by this equipage, and more than one nearly fell off with admiration. Musidora, who at any other time would have been flattered by the sensation she created, did not pay the least attention to it. She was no longer a coquette. A real metamorphosis had taken place in her. Nothing was left of the Musidora of old but her name and her beauty. Even her beauty had no longer the same character.

Until now she had been wittily beautiful; now she was passionately lovely.

No doubt it will be thought unlikely that such a change should have occurred so suddenly, and that so great a love should have resulted from a single meeting. Whereto I shall answer that truth is stranger than fiction, and that fiction always has an appearance of probability because it is combined, arranged, and worked out beforehand to produce the effect of truth. Electroplate often looks more like silver plate than silver plate itself. Next, I will point out that a woman's heart is a labyrinth so full of twists, turns, and obscure nooks, that even the greatest poets, who have ventured into it bearing in their hand the golden lamp of genius, have not always managed to find their way about, and that no one can boast of the possession of the thread which leads to the exit from that maze. As far as women are concerned, anything may be expected from them, especially absurdity.

Many respectable people will no doubt be of the opinion that the lightning-bolts of love are mere romantic illusions, and that no one falls madly in love with a man or a woman who has been seen but once. For myself it is my belief that if one does not love a

person at first sight, there is no reason to love her when she is seen a second time and still less reason when she is seen a third.

Then Musidora had to fall in love with Fortunio, otherwise my novel could not have been written. Also, my hero, rich, young, handsome, witty, mysterious, must of necessity have been adored at first sight. Many others, who do not have one-half these qualities, are just as successful. And what is there strange in a young woman loving a handsome young man? So, whether the thing is reasonable or not, Musidora adores Fortunio, whom she does not know or whom she has seen but once, which is the same thing. And this digression does not prevent her carriage from flying rapidly along the great avenue of the Champs-Élysées and passing the Arc de l'Étoile, the gigantic gate which opens on space.

Nature on that day wore a very different aspect from that which it had when Musidora was traversing the Bois de Boulogne in every direction on the chance of meeting Fortunio. The dark red of the buds had been replaced by tender green, the colour of hope, and the birds were warbling joyous promises on the branches; the heavens, with floating masses of white clouds,

looked like a great blue eye gazing lovingly upon earth. A sweet scent of new foliage and of green grass rose in the air like the incense of spring. Little yellow butterflies fluttered about the flowers, and played in the luminous rays which struck across the green background of the landscape. Infinite delight filled heaven and earth; everything breathed joy and life; the atmosphere was impregnated with youth and happiness, — at least, that was Musidora's feeling. She saw everything through the prism of passion.

Passions are like yellow, blue, and red glasses, which give their colour to everything. Thus a prospect which, in a moment of despair appeared hideous, repulsive, bare as bones, repellent in its wretchedness and ugliness, and more inhospitable than a Scythian steppe, when looked at through the glass of happiness appears diapered with flowers, sparkling with shining waters, green sward, distant horizons, — in a word, a real earthly paradise. Nature is somewhat like a great symphony which each one interprets in his own way. One man hears the last cry of Jesus expiring on the cross, while his neighbour, on the other hand, believes he is listening to the pearly trills of the nightingale and the shrill piping of shepherds.

Musidora was just then interpreting the symphony in the amorous and pastoral mode.

The carriage drove on; the great trees, bending their crests, flew by to right and left like a routed army, and yet Fortunio did not appear. Musidora began to feel anxious. Suppose Fortunio had changed his mind! She read his note again; it seemed plain enough, and she felt somewhat reassured.

At last she perceived at the very end of the avenue a little whirlwind of white dust which rapidly drew near. She felt so deeply moved that she was obliged to lean back in the carriage; the blood surged through her veins; her cheeks flushed and paled; her hand dropped the note, which she had pressed with almost convulsive vigour. The supreme moment was approaching which was to decide her fate.

Soon the cloud of dust, opening like a classical cloud enshrouding a deity, allowed her to make out a black horse with long mane and tail, arched neck, narrow shoulders, clean fetlocks, fiery eyes and nostrils, resembling more a hippogriff than an ordinary quadruped. The horse was bestridden by a horseman who was none else than Fortunio in person. A short distance behind him galloped a thick-lipped Moor.

It was indeed Fortunio, with that air of careless security which he never lost, and which gave him so much ascendency over every one. It seemed as though none of the ills to which man is heir could touch him; that he felt himself above the attacks of fate. Serenity reigned on his beautiful face as on a pedestal of marble.

He advanced towards the carriage, making his horse perform prodigious curvetings. Sometimes he made it leap into the air, sometimes rear up and proceed on its hind-legs. The noble animal lent itself to all his exigencies with marvellous coquetry and grace. It seemed to seek to rival its master in gracefulness and boldness. They appeared to be but one creature animated by one soul; for Fortunio had neither spur nor whip, and did not even hold the bridle in his hands. He guided his steed by imperceptible means, and it was quite impossible to see by what method he transmitted his wishes to the intelligent animal.

When within fifty yards of the carriage, he sent his horse at top speed until within a foot of the victoria. Musidora, terrified at the thought that he must be dashed against the wheels, uttered a great cry; but Fortunio, by a skilful trick well known to Arab horse-

men, suddenly pulled up his horse and passed without transition from the most rapid pace to the most complete immobility. One could have sworn that an enchanter had spellbound horse and rider. After this he made his barb — for it was a barb — curvet by the carriage door, and as he made him kick violently, he bowed to Musidora with the same grace and the same ease as if he were standing on the solid floor of a drawing-room.

"Madam," said he, "pardon a poor savage who in his long travels through the East and India has forgotten the ways of European gallantry, and who scarcely knows now how to behave with ladies. If I had been presumptuous enough to suppose you wished for my presence, be assured I should have hastened to you with all the speed that Tippoo is capable of; but I could not suppose that an extravagant fellow like myself, whom travels in far regions have made eccentric, could in any wise even pique your curiosity."

I should much like to tell you what was Musidora's reply, but I never learned it. All I know is that she opened her lips as she raised to Fortunio's face her beautiful, brilliant, melting eyes. She murmured something, but I listened in vain and could not catch a single

syllable. The sand grinding under the wheels and the trampling of the horses no doubt drowned Musidora's inarticulate voice. I greatly regret it, for it would have been interesting to collect these precious words.

"Musidora," went on Fortunio, in a soft, yet sonorous voice, "no doubt you have been told many strange things about me. My friends are very imaginative. What will you think when you find out that far from being the hero of a novel, a mysterious being, the victim of fate, I am simply an ordinary fellow, rather good-natured, although capricious and occasionally fantastic. I assure you, Musidora, that I drink wine and not molten gold at my meals; that I eat more oysters than pearls dissolved in vinegar; that I sleep in a bed, although more generally I lie in a hammock, and that I usually walk on my hind-legs, unless I borrow those of Tippoo, Zerlina, or Agandecca, my favourite mare. That is my way of life. I prefer verse to prose, music to verse. There is nothing in the world I hold superior to a painting by Titian except a beautiful woman. I have no other political opinions. I hate my friends only, and I should be rather inclined to be a philanthropist if men were monkeys. I should be willing enough to believe in God if only

He were not so like a parish beadle, and I think roses are more useful than cabbages. Now you know me as well as if you had lived with me for ten years. And this is about all the information I can give about myself, for really I know nothing more."

Musidora could not help laughing at Fortunio's profession of faith.

"Really," she said, "you are very modest if you think you are not eccentric, for, Mr. Fortunio, you are very much so."

"I? Not at all. I am the most commonplace individual in the world. I eat only what I like and I live for myself alone. But the sun is getting hot and your parasol will soon be insufficient to protect you from its burning rays. Will you not do me the pleasure to rest for a moment in a hut, a sort of Indian wigwam, which I have close by? You could return to Paris this evening in the cool of the twilight."

"Willingly," replied Musidora. "I shall not be sorry to see your veranda, your wigwam, as you call it, for I am told that you do not live anywhere, but that you roost."

"Sometimes, but not always. I have spent more than one night in a tree, fastened by my sash to the

trunk so that I should not break my head by falling backwards; but here I live like the most debonair of civilians. All I need is a red-tiled roof and green blinds to pass for the most Arcadian and sentimental fellow in the world. Hadji! Hadji! Come here, I have something to tell you."

In a couple of strides the Moor was by Fortunio's side. Fortunio spoke a few words in a foreign tongue with a guttural and strange intonation. Hadji immediately went off at full speed.

"Pardon me, madam, for speaking in your presence in an unknown tongue, but that rascal does not know a word of French or any other Christian language."

"I hope," said Musidora, "that you have not sent him to make any preparations on my account. Do you propose to have me received at the foot of your steps by a deputation of young girls dressed in white, with bouquets wrapped in paper? I insist that you shall not stand on ceremony with me."

"I merely sent Hadji," answered Fortunio, "to put my tame lion and Betsy, my tigress, in their cages. They are charming animals, as gentle as lambs, but you might have been startled at the sight of them. I

am very old-maidish in this respect, — I cannot do without animals. My house is a regular menagerie."

"Are the bars of the cages solid?" said Musidora, rather alarmed.

"Oh, very solid," replied Fortunio, laughing. "Here we are."

XVI

Fortunio's house had no façade. Two rock-work terraces with corners of vermiculated stone, steps with pot-bellied balustrades, and pedestals supporting great vases of blue china filled with cacti, in the taste of the time of Louis XIII, rose on either side of a massive oaken gate admirably carved and adorned with two medallions of Roman emperors surrounded with wreaths. These two terraces formed a sort of bastion, which kept off inquisitive looks. Below them were the stables. The carriage with its four horses dashed at full gallop against the gate, which opened, turning on its hinges as if by magic without any one appearing to throw it back. The carriage drove round a great sanded court surrounded by box-wood arcades, and thus gave my heroine time to look at the house of the beloved Fortunio.

At the back of the court sparkled in the bright sunshine a building of white stones joined with such care that it seemed cut out of one block. Niches framed richly, and filled with antique busts, alone broke the surface of the wall, which was entirely devoid of windows. A bronze door, over which quivered the shadow of a striped awning, opened in the centre of the building. Three steps of white marble — on either side of which lay two sphinxes, their paws crossed under their pointed breasts — led to the door.

The carriage stopped under the awning. Fortunio got down, raised the lovely girl, and placed her gently on the upper step. Then he touched the door, which slid into the wall and closed as soon as they had entered.

They found themselves in a broad hall lighted from above, out of which four doors opened. It was paved with a mosaic representing pigeons perched on the edge of a great cup, bending to drink in it, with scrolls, flowers, and festoons, — the veritable mosaic of Zosimus of Pergamos which antiquarians believed lost.

Pillars of yellow breccia, half engaged in the wall, supported an attic delicately carved, and formed a frame for waxed paintings, on the black background of which

were represented dancers of antiquity, lightly lifting up their tunics, curving their white, slender arms like the handles of alabaster amphoræ, or waving their hands, which bore sonorous crotala. Never were more graceful silhouettes painted on the walls of Herculaneum or Pompeii.

Musidora stopped to look at them.

"Oh, do not look at these daubs," said Fortunio, showing Musidora into a room on the side. "Confess that you expected something better. You must consider me a somewhat poor imitation of Sardanapalus, for until now I have offered to your gaze but mean enjoyments. My Asiatic and Babylonian splendours are very imperfect, and I scarcely manage to attain the *mediocritas aurea* of Horace. A hermit might live here."

In point of fact, the room into which he had led Musidora was exceedingly plain. It had no other furniture than a very low divan which ran around it. The walls, the ceiling, the floor were covered with exceedingly fine matting adorned with brilliant patterns. Through blinds of China reeds, kept damp with scented water, showed the soft outlines of the distant landscape; the windows were glazed with white

panes adorned with red vine-leaves. In the centre of the ceiling, in a sort of round window, was fitted a glass globe filled with clear, limpid water, in which swam blue fishes with golden fins. Their constant motion filled the room with changing prismatic reflections which produced the most curious effect. Exactly below the globe a small jet of water shot up in a slender crystal thread, that wavered at the least breath and fell back into a porphyry basin in pearly, sparkling spray. In one corner swung a palm-leaf hammock, and in the other stood a magnificent hookah, its supple black rings twisted around the rock-crystal vase adorned with silver filigree-work in which the smoke was cooled. And that was all.

"Sit down, fair queen," said Fortunio, cleverly removing Musidora's shawl, as he led her by the hand to the corner of the divan. "Place this cushion behind you, this one under your elbow, and this under your feet. There, that is right. I tell you, Orientals alone know how to sit down properly, and one of their poets wrote these two lines, which contain more sense than all the philosophies in the world: 'It is better to be seated than standing, to be lying down than seated, to be dead than lying down.' Match me in all the

lamentations of our fashionable rimesters this distich of good Ferid ed din Atar's."

As he said these words, Fortunio stretched himself out upon the palm-leaf matting beside Musidora.

"Well, you are lying down, so you have reached the second degree of happiness," said Musidora. "This morning I came very near passing to the third."

"What?" said Fortunio, raising himself on his elbow. "You nearly died this morning? Is it only your shadow that I see? No, you are very much alive," and to make sure of it, he took her foot and kissed it. "I can feel your soft, warm skin through this fine net-work."

"All the same, if your note had not come at five minutes to twelve, I should now be white and cold, and secure for a long time in the delight of being laid out horizontally. At noon I was going to kill myself."

"However passionately Oriental I am, I share Ferid ed din's opinion only up to the half of his second line. The last hemistich is excellent for men who are merely not millionaires, and for women whom ugliness compels to be virtuous; you are not of them. What motive could you have had to adopt the violent resolution to slay yourself at noon exactly?"

"I do not know. I had the vapours; the blue devils were worrying me; I was quite worn out, — I did not know how to spend my day; so that, unable to kill time, I concluded to kill myself, and I should certainly have done it if the wish to try your carriage had not recalled me to life."

"Many people that I am acquainted with have satisfied themselves with much less good reasons to live than that one. One of my friends, who had already put the barrel of his pistol into his mouth, very fortunately remembered that he had forgotten to write his epitaph. The notion of not having an epitaph was distinctly unpleasant to him. He laid his pistol on the table, took a sheet of paper, and wrote the following verses: —

'Over cruel Fate the will doth triumph,
The feeblest mortal destiny may conquer
If he has courage and —'

Here my unfortunate friend stopped for lack of a rime. He scratched his head and bit his fingers, but in vain; he rang for a servant and had him bring a dictionary of rimes which he read from end to end without finding what he wanted; for there is no rime to 'triumph.' De Marcilly happened to come in and took him off to

a gambling-house, where he won a hundred thousand francs that set him going again. Since that time he has led a jolly life, and never kisses the barrel of his pistols. This most true story proves the usefulness of difficult rimes in the composition of epitaphs."

"Oh, Fortunio, you are cruel and sarcastic!" said Musidora, with a slight accent of reproach. "Do you suppose that unrequited love is not a very good reason for dying?"

Fortunio fixed his limpid eyes upon her with an expression of infinite sweetness, then with a quick motion, he sprang from his matting to the divan, and putting one of his arms behind her he pressed her to him.

"Why, who told you, child, that your love was disdained?"

A frightful growl, hoarse and guttural, was heard not far from the room. Musidora rose terrified.

"It is only my tigress, which scents me and wants to see me. The devil of a brute has broken her chain. She is always doing it. Excuse me, madam, I shall tie her up more carefully and talk to her a little to calm her. She is as jealous of me as if she were a woman."

Fortunio took up a Malay creese concealed under the cushion, and went out. Musidora heard him playing with the tigress in the corridor. Fortunio spoke in an unknown tongue which the tigress seemed to understand, and to which she replied with low roars. The joyous beating of her tail sounded on the wall like the blows of a flail. After a few moments the sound died away, and Fortunio returned. He had changed his riding costume and wore a remarkably magnificent dress: a brocade caftan with wide sleeves, bound around the waist with a golden cord, fell in handsome folds around his graceful and robust form; on his head was a cap of red velvet embroidered in gold and pearls, with a long tassel hanging down his back. His hair, naturally curly, fell in the most picturesque black spirals; his bare feet were at ease in Turkish slippers; full, striped silk drawers completed his dress. Through his open shirt could be seen the whiteness of his marble chest, on which shone a small amulet adorned with embroidery and spangles, very like the small bags which Neapolitan fishermen wear around their necks. Was it, in Fortunio's case, a matter of superstition, eccentricity, caprice, a tender souvenir, or mere love of local colour? No one has ever known. What is

certain is that the bright colours of the shining amulet brought out wonderfully the marble whiteness of his supple, polished flesh.

"Musidora," said he, as he re-entered the room, "are you hungry or thirsty? Let us try to get something to eat and drink. You will forgive the defects of a country household managed by a half-wild fellow who, so far as cookery goes, knows only how to dress elephants' feet and bisons' humps. Come this way," said he, raising the portière; "do not be afraid."

Fortunio, having put his arm around Musidora's waist like Othello leading out Desdemona, made his trembling beauty enter a small room decorated in the Pompadour style. It was hung with rose damask with a pattern of silver flowers; there were paintings by Watteau above the doors, and the ceiling represented an apple-green sky dappled with cloudlets and peopled with swarms of puffy cupids casting flowers broadcast. Although it was bright daylight everywhere else, it was night in the small drawing-room, for it is ignoble and utterly unworthy of a man who professes elegant sensuality to eat save by candle-light. Two chandeliers, fastened by red and silver cords harmonising with the hangings, hung from the ceiling. Ten candelabra,

laden with tapers, intertwining their capricious branches with the borders of the bays, shed a dazzling light upon the gilded furniture and the hangings. At the back, under a baldacchino with silver tassels, spread out like a gigantic bed, a marvellous sofa of white satin brocaded with gold. In every corner were shelves and cabinets in old lacquer-work, covered with Chinese figures, Japanese vases, and porcelain figures. It was a regular great lady's boudoir.

Fortunio took an arm-chair and placed it exactly in the centre of the room. He placed another opposite to it and sat down, after requesting Musidora to do the same.

"Now let us eat," he said in the most serious fashion possible. "I have more appetite than I expected," and he pulled up his cuffs like a man about to carve.

Musidora looked at him with some anxiety, and for a moment feared he had lost his reason, though he seemed perfectly self-possessed; yet there was nothing in the room to indicate preparations for a meal, neither table nor attendants. Suddenly two leaves of the floor fell back, and to the great surprise of Musidora, a splendidly lighted table rose slowly, accompanied by two maids. The figures and ornaments of the centre-

piece, every part of which sparkled with light, were so brilliant as to eclipse the very orb of day itself. The water-green of the malachite urns, in which the champagne was shivering in its thin glass robe under the white crystals of ice, contrasted happily with the red tones of the gold. Baskets of gold and silver filigree-work of the most precious workmanship, with patterns more delicate and exquisitely wrought than lace, were filled with the rarest fruits: grapes red and yellow as amber, huge crimson peaches, pineapples with saw-edged leaves, giving out a warm, tropical scent, and cherries and strawberries of uncommon size. The first fruits of spring and the last presents which autumn pours out from its late basket met on this table, amazed at being for the first time brought face to face. The seasons and the ordinary course of nature did not appear to exist, so far as Fortunio was concerned.

From porphyry bowls rose pyramids of West Indian preserves, roses, pomegranates, oranges, lemons,—everything, indeed, that the most luxurious gormandism could collect in the way of refined, exquisite, and ruinously rare confections. I have, contrary to the usual custom, begun by the dessert, but is not the dessert the whole of the dinner for a pretty woman?

However, in order to reassure the reader, who might think these dishes not very substantial for a hero of the size and strength of Fortunio, I shall add that in blazoned dishes, admirably chased, and placed upon braziers of platinum inlaid with niello, smoked roast quails surrounded by chaplets of ortolans, fish-balls, game stews, and for chief dish a China pheasant with its feathers on, and besides all this, milt of red mullet, cray fish, and other stimulants to drink.

Champagne, the only wine I have named, may seem too frivolous and of too transitory a sparkle for so serious a toper as Fortunio. Flagons of Bohemian glass embroidered with golden arabesques, contained within their transparent form enough to produce a proper and suitable intoxication: Tokay wine, such as Metternich himself never drank; Johannisberger, six times superior to the nectar of the gods so far as savour and bouquet go; real wine of Shiraz, of which at the time this story was written there were only two bottles in Europe, the one owned by George and the other by de Marcilly, who kept them under triple locks for some supreme occasion.

"Fortunio, you have not kept your word, you have indulged, on my account, in frightful extravagance,"

said Musidora, in a tone of friendly reproach. "Did you expect company? This collation might serve a Gamache or a Gargantua."

"Not at all, dear queen. I have not made the least preparation, for no one loathes ceremony more than I do. I am of the opinion that cordiality is the best sauce. This is a mere stand-by which is always kept ready for me day and night, so that if I happen to be hungry at any time, there is no necessity to go to the yard, to wring a chicken's neck, pluck it, and spit it. As I have told you, I am of most patriarchal simplicity: I eat only when hungry and drink only when thirsty; when I am sleepy, I go to bed. But I beg of you, my angel, to remember that you are at table. You are taking nothing, and your food remains on your plate untouched. Do not fear to cause me disenchantment by dining with a good appetite. I do not share Lord Byron's views on this point, and besides, I do not like wings. I should be very sorry, madam, if you were merely a vapour."

In spite of Fortunio's request, Musidora was satisfied with nibbling at a few sweets and drinking two or three glasses of rosy tea, with a small glass of Barbadoes cream. Her emotion had destroyed her appetite,

and the presence of the ideal of her heart moved her to such an extent that she could scarcely carry her fork to her mouth. What perfect happiness, to dine alone with the impalpable Fortunio, to be waited upon by him in his retreat unknown to every one else, to be avenged in such splendid fashion of the hypocritical airs of compassion of Phœbe and Arabella; and perhaps, — though she scarcely dared to allow her mind to dwell upon the delightful and voluptuous thought, — to lay her head upon that handsome, solid, white chest and entwine her arms around that round, fair neck.

Fortunio was most attentive to her, and he paid her with the lordly, almost regal air which came naturally to him, most exquisitely graceful and delicate compliments.

I wish I could report their brilliant conversation, but I cannot do so without manifesting unbearable vanity. As a conscientious novelist, I have invented so perfect a hero that I am afraid to make use of him. I feel much the same embarrassment, *si parva licet componere magnis*, as did Milton when he had to make the Almighty speak in that wonderful poem, "Paradise Lost." I can find nothing fine or splendid enough for my purpose. The course of my narration, besides,

compels me to use expressions like this: "At this witty remark of Fortunio's, a lovely smile lighted up Musidora's face." The remark must necessarily be witty, or at least appear to be so, which is a difficult matter. There is another very unpleasant situation for an author who is gifted with any modesty: it is when the hero recites a piece of verse which deeply impresses the hearers, who exclaim at the end of each stanza, "Wonderful! sublime! splendid! excellent!" For myself, as I am shy, I shall gladly turn to account the convenient method of the old painters who, when they did not know how to draw something, or found it too difficult to depict, wrote in its place, "*Currus venustus*," or "*Pulcher homo*," according as it was a man or a carriage.

The repast had long been finished, the table had disappeared through the trap like a perjured wretch in the opera, and Fortunio, seated upon the divan, passed his hand through the waves of Musidora's fair hair. Her head, bowed by love, sank like a flower full of dew; her whole body trembled spasmodically; her heaving breast rose and fell beneath her dress; her arms fell limp, she seemed about to faint. Fortunio bent towards her, and their lips met in a delicious, endless kiss.

XVII

MUSIDORA had not breathed a word of her love to Fortunio. That was a great mistake. She ought to have made endless speeches and indulged in the most transcendental metaphysics of sentiment. I should have found a fine opportunity for showing that "her heart was admirably formed for love," and I could have filled quite a comfortable number of pages; but the truth is that she said nothing, and being a fantastic novelist, truth is too sacred to allow me to invent a single sentence.

Her eyes, filled with a moist light, her heaving bosom, her trembling voice, a sudden paleness swiftly followed by a sudden flush, told of the state of her soul much more eloquently than the most brilliant verses could have done, and Fortunio's mute kiss was in its way a perfect reply. Besides, you know very well that people talk only when they have nothing to say.

Perhaps it will be thought that Musidora yielded very quickly to Fortunio, for this was only the second time that she had met him; but I must remind you on her behalf that Musidora did not profess to be vir-

tuous, — and then, by way of apophthegm, that love is prodigal, and that to love is to give. So Musidora attacked Fortunio's heart by voluptuousness, which is an excellent plan.

I shall turn to account the moments during which my two chief characters forget the world, to say something about my hero; for every writer's duty is to unravel for his reader the skein which he has ravelled at will, and to clear away the mysterious clouds which he has brought together himself at the very beginning of his work, so that the end might not be too early perceived.

Fortunio is a young nobleman of the highest aristocracy, just as much an aristocrat as a king, and as good a nobleman. The Marquis Fortunio, his father, whose fortune was impaired, had sent him, still very young, to India, to one of his uncles (pray forgive the uncle!), a nabob of colossal and titanic wealth. Fortunio's youth was spent in hunting tigers and elephants, in being carried in palanquins, drinking arrack, chewing betel, and watching, seated upon a Persian carpet, dancing-girls with golden anklets on their little feet, and their breasts enclosed in sheaths of scented wood. His uncle, a clever, voluptuous old man, who had his

own ideas as to the education of children, had allowed Fortunio's character to develop freely; being desirous, he said, to see how a child would turn out if he were never repressed and enjoyed the fullest opportunities of having his own way. His own inexhaustible fortune afforded him every facility for carrying out this plan of education, and his nephew never had any caprice which had not at once been satisfied. He never spoke to the lad of morals or religion; he did not terrify him with thoughts of God, the devil, or even the statute law, — for laws do not exist for a man who has twenty millions a year. He allowed this vigorous human plant to shoot out right and left its strong branches laden with wild perfume. He cut off nothing, not a knot, not a single contorted branch; on the other hand, he did not destroy a single leaf or a single flower.

Fortunio remained such as God had made him. Never did an unsatisfied desire sink back into his heart to gnaw it with its rat-like teeth. His passions, always gratified, left not a mark, not a wrinkle on his brow; he was gentle, calm, and strong like a god, whose exterminating power he almost possessed. Young, handsome, vigorous, rich, witty, there was no

one on earth whom he could envy, and he felt himself envied by all. He did not even have to desire the beauty of women, for his mistresses willingly confessed that they were inferior to him in the inimitable perfection of form.

At fifteen years of age he had a seraglio of five hundred slaves of all races to serve him, and as many lacs of rupees as he could spend. His uncle's treasury was open to him, and he drew heavily upon it. Never did care of the future or of his fortune shadow his fair brow with its bat-like wings. He lived careless in a golden atmosphere, never supposing that it could be otherwise. Great was his surprise when he discovered that there were actually people who did not have three hundred thousand a year. Like all spoiled children, Fortunio became a superior man. He had his faults and also his qualities. Ordinary teachers will not admit that a mountain pre-supposes a valley, a tower a well, and anything which shines in the sun a deep dark excavation from which it has been drawn.

There is nothing more detestable in this world than a man smoothed and planed like a board, incapable of running the risk of being hanged, and who has not in him the stuff for a crime or two.

Fortunio was capable of everything, for good as well as for evil, but his position was such that he had no need to do harm. From the height of his wealth he beheld men so small that he did not trouble with them. The black swarm of wretches crawling about his feet and labouring for a year to earn with difficulty as much gold as he spent in a month, did not appear to him worthy of the attention of a well-born man. He did not understand charity or philanthropy, but his caprices caused an abundant shower of gold to rain constantly around him, and all who lived in his shadow soon became rich. In fine, he did more good than thirty thousand virtuous men who distribute cheap soup. He was beneficent after the fashion of the sun, which, without giving a cent to anybody, gives life and riches to the whole world.

As he had never had any teacher, he knew a great many things and knew them thoroughly, having learned them alone. Being placed very high and not estopped by any prejudice of birth or position, he was broad-minded and far-seeing. If he had chosen to be an emperor or a king, he could have been one. Nothing would have been easier, with his boldness, his intelligence, his beauty, his knowledge of men, and his tre-

mendous means of corruption. Through carelessness and disdain he left potentates in peace on their thrones, satisfied with being an actual king.

A distinctive feature of Fortunio's character was that, capable of everything, he was in no wise disillusioned; he estimated nothing above its proper value, but he did not systematically despise anything. As all his desires were fulfilled almost as soon as they were formed, he did not experience the fatigue caused by the attraction of the soul towards an object which it cannot reach; for it is not enjoyment that wears men out, but desire. He loved wine, good cheer, horses, and women, just as if he had never had any of them. Whatever was beautiful, splendid, and radiant pleased him. He understood equally well the beauty of a hut with its vine-clad door, its roof with brown, velvety moss strewn with wild flowers, and the magnificence of a marble palace with its fluted columns and its attic studded with endless white statues. He admired equally art and nature; he was passionately fond of red-haired women, which did not prevent his being entirely satisfied with negresses and coloured girls. Spanish women charmed him, but he adored English women, and did not disdain Hindoos; even French

women struck him as very agreeable. He had also a marked taste for Raphael's Madonnas and Titian's courtesans. In a word, he was an eclectic of the very first water, and no one ever carried cosmopolitanism farther than he. And yet, — I confess it to his shame, or his praise, — he was never known to have a regular mistress, and no one ever knew that he had a regular domicile. As for his slaves, black, yellow, or red, they were thrashed as often as the Scapins of comedy or the Daves in Plautus' plays. Strangely enough, he was worshipped by his servants, who would have gone through fire and water to please him. He treated them so much like brutes that he had made them believe they were dogs, and had inspired them with the loving servility of that animal. Never did he have to repeat an order. Indeed, he rarely took the trouble to express his will by words; a gesture, a glance was sufficient.

He had always in his carriage-house a carriage and pair ready harnessed, and two horses saddled and bridled; a dinner was constantly held prepared in the pantry; Fortunio had never yet had to wait for any one or anything. Obstacles and delays were unknown to him. He did not know what to-morrow meant;

in his case everything could be to-day; he was able to turn the future into the present.

When his uncle died, he was about twenty, and he felt the wish to see Europe, France, Paris; so he came, bringing with him twenty fortunes, tons of gold, coffers of diamonds, etc.

At first, accustomed as he was to Oriental splendour, everything struck him as mean, wretched, and small. The richest noblemen seemed to him like ragged beggars. Yet he very soon discovered, under the mean and dull aspect, a whole world of ideas the very existence of which he had not hitherto suspected. In this world he made the most rapid progress, and was soon as much at home in it as a thorough-bred Parisian, thanks to his admirable natural instinct. It delighted him, after having tasted the deep, wild charm of barbaric life, to enjoy the refinements of the highest civilisation; after having hunted tigers on an elephant's back with Malays in the Javanese jungles he liked to go hunting in company with members of Parliament, mounted on a half-bred hunter and sporting pink; after having dressed in muslin, and, seated cross-legged on a mat of perfumed reeds in the shadow of the great pagoda at Benares, watching the genuine bayaderes, it

amused him to watch at the Opera, holding his glasses in his yellow kid-gloved hands, Mademoiselle Taglioni in "The God and the Bayadere." Only at first he had found it very difficult to keep from beheading the people who bored him.

The only thing to which his Eastern habits could not conform was to see his house open to everybody, and bold pirates insinuate themselves into the secret recesses of his life under the guise of intimate friends. He met his companions in pleasure in society, at the theatre, out driving, but no one had set foot in his home. If he could not help entertaining them, he did so in some apartment engaged for the purpose, and which he immediately left for fear they should return to it.

His life was divided into two very complete parts: the one entirely external, with steeplechases, joyous suppers, and follies of all kinds; the other mysterious, apart, and absolutely unknown.

Fortunio had been told once that he had had neither a duchess nor an opera dancer, and that he needed these to be entirely in the fashion; whereto he replied that he looked upon the former as too old and the latter as too thin: nevertheless he was seen the

next day at the Bouffes with an opera dancer, and the day after that with a duchess. The dancer was plump and the duchess young, which was doubly extraordinary. Having made this sacrifice to conventionalities, Fortunio resumed his usual way of life, appearing and disappearing without ever saying where he went or whence he came. His companions' curiosity had at first been excited to the highest degree, but little by little it had been dulled, and Fortunio had been taken for what he chose to represent himself.

Musidora's love had awakened the desire to penetrate the mystery of his life, and his eccentricities were more than ever talked about, yet every one was compelled to be satisfied with vague conjectures; the real truth was unknown; George himself knew of Fortunio only what related to his life in India. I have myself nothing more particular to tell my reader about him; nevertheless I hope soon to track him into his secret retreat.

XVIII

The victoria with the dapple-gray horses returned empty to Musidora's house, to the great astonishment of Jacintha, Jack, and Zamora. Musidora the dove-

like had chosen for that night the nest of Fortunio the eagle.

A rosy red sunbeam struck through the curtains of a sumptuous bed with spiral columns surmounted by a carved frieze. Like a bee hesitating before it alights on a flower, it quivered on Musidora's lips, asleep with her hair loose and her arms gracefully rounded above her head. Fortunio, leaning on his elbow, was watching with melancholy attention the young girl overshadowed by the angel of sleep. Her pure and delicate form showed in all its perfection. Her skin, fine and satiny like a camellia leaf, slightly flushed here and there by a fold of the sheet or the mark of a burning kiss, shone in the warm moisture of repose. One tress of her hair, passed between her neck and her arm, fell upon her breast which it seemed to seek to bite like Cleopatra's asp. At the foot of the bed one of her white dimpled feet, the nails polished like agate, the heel rosy, the ankle of the daintiest, emerged from under the coverlet; the other, drawn back, could be vaguely made out under the many folds. The tawny, golden complexion of Fortunio contrasted happily with the ideal fairness of Musidora. It was like a Giorgione by the side of a Lawrence, like yellow Italian amber

by the side of blue-veined English alabaster, and it would have been difficult to say which was the more lovely of the pair.

Fortunio's practised eye analysed the beauties of his mistress with the double gaze of a lover and an artist. He was as much of a connoisseur in women as in statues and horses, which is saying not a little. Apparently he was satisfied with his examination, for a smile of content hovered over his lips; he bent over Musidora, and kissed her softly lest he should wake her. Then he resumed his silent contemplation.

"She is very beautiful," he murmured, "but decidedly I prefer Soudja-Sari, my Javanese girl. I shall go and see her to-morrow."

"Did you not speak, my dear lord?" said Musidora, raising her long lashes.

"No, queenlet," replied Fortunio, pressing her in his arms.

XIX

Here I am sunk in perplexity again. I had managed to discover the origin of Fortunio's wealth; I had obtained fairly satisfactory information concerning the manner in which he was brought up, his mode of life,

his views on morality and philosophy; in spite of all his cleverness in concealing himself and his Protean skill in avoiding curiosity, I had managed to lay my hand on him and to penetrate into one of his retreats, — perhaps even his chief retreat; and now all my trouble is lost. I have to set out again and seek in every direction for the solution of this new mystery. What accursed idea induced that confounded Fortunio to utter by Musidora's side so incongruous a name as Soudja-Sari? Evidently my feminine readers will want to know who is Soudja-Sari the Javanese girl. Is she a mistress whom Fortunio had in India, the woman to whom was addressed the Malay *pantoum* found in the stolen pocket-book and translated by the date-selling rajah? I cannot answer this important question. It is the first time that I have heard the name of Soudja-Sari; she is as much a stranger to me as the Great Khan of Tartary, and I confess that this remembrance of Fortunio's is entirely out of place. Does he not possess Musidora, a lovely creature, a peerless pearl, whose soul, regenerated by love, is as beautiful as its frame, a supreme effort of nature to prove its power, the most suave, delicate, perfect, and finished creature imaginable? Is not that enough for a novel,

and am I to favour my libertine hero so far as to grant him two mistresses at once? It would be far better to give six lovers to Musidora than two mistresses to Fortunio; women would forgive me more easily, though Heaven knows why. Yet I shall do my best to satisfy the curiosity of the ladies.

Soudja-Sari is not a former mistress of Fortunio's, since he has just said that he means to go to see her to-morrow. Where is he going to see her? It cannot be in Java, for there is no railway yet between Paris and Java, and even did Fortunio possess the wand of Abaris, he could not make the trip between evening and morning; and he promised Musidora to accompany her to the Opera at the next performance. Soudja-Sari, therefore, must be in Paris or its suburbs, but in what part? Is it in the Cité Bergère, where dwell the houris, or the Faubourg Saint-Germain? At Saint-Maur or at Auteuil? *Hic jacet lepus*, — that is the question.

I must be content with telling you that Soudja-Sari means "The Languorous Eye," in accordance with Eastern custom which gives women names drawn from their physical peculiarities. Thanks to the translation of this significant name, which I owe to the kindness

of a member of the Asiatic Society deeply versed in Javanese, Malay, and other Indian tongues, we now know that Soudja-Sari is a beautiful girl with a voluptuous eye, with a velvety, dreamy look. Which shall win, Soudja-Sari's jet-like eyes or Musidora's sea-green eyes?

XX

Fortunio's house plunged into the river on one side. A white marble staircase, some of the steps of which were above or under water according to the abundance of rain or the heat of the sun, led from Fortunio's room to a little gilded, painted boat covered with a silk awning.

Fortunio proposed to take a turn on the river before breakfast. Musidora agreed. She sat down under the awning on a pile of cushions; Fortunio lay down at her feet, smoking his hookah, and four negroes dressed in red jackets sent the boat gliding along like a kingfisher that cuts the water with its wing. Musidora plunged her slender hand in Fortunio's black, silky hair with ineffable delight. At last she had him, that long-wished-for Fortunio, seated at her feet, his head resting in her lap; she had eaten at his table, lain in his bed,

slept in his arms. At one step she had penetrated into that unknown life so difficult to enter; she possessed the man she loved, she who had been possessed by men she hated. She experienced that total forgetfulness of everything which comes of true love, and allowed herself to be carelessly borne away on the swift current of passion. Her previous life was entirely effaced; she lived only since the night before, she had begun to live only from the day when she had seen Fortunio.

Her only fear was lest her life should not be long enough to prove her love for him. Ten years, the longest time which one dare venture to suggest for a liaison, appeared to her very short. She would have liked to preserve her dear passion beyond the tomb: she who had hitherto had been more atheistical than Voltaire himself believed firmly in the immortality of the soul, in order to indulge the hope of loving Fortunio to all eternity.

The boat glided swiftly over the calm surface of the river; the four sweeps of the rowers did not splash, and the one sound heard was the ripple of the water that rushed past the boat in foamy waves. Fortunio dropped his hookah, took Musidora's two feet, placed them on his chest as on an ivory foot-

stool, and began to whistle carelessly a quaint and melancholy air. The shadows of the poplars on the bank fell upon the boat, which seemed to float in a sea of foliage. Jimp-waisted dragon-flies flew under the awning in the transparent whirlwind of their gauzy wings, and gazed at our two lovers with their emerald eyes. A silver-bellied fish leaped here and there and marked the oily surface of the water with a passing gleam of light. There was not a breath of air; the light tops of the reeds were motionless, and the boat's ensign fell into the water in soft, heavy folds. The sky, filled with light, was silvery gray, for the intense noonday sun had killed the blue, and on the edge of the horizon rose a warm dun-coloured mist like that of the Egyptian skies.

"By Jove!" said Fortunio, throwing off the white cashmere burnoose which he wore, "I have a great mind to bathe;" and he sprang from the gunwale of the boat.

Although Musidora was a swimmer, she could not repress an emotion of terror on seeing the water boil as it closed over Fortunio's head, but he soon reappeared, shaking his long hair, which dropped on his shoulders. Fortunio swam as well as the finest and most elegant

Triton in Neptune's court; the fishes themselves would not have had much chance against him. He was beautiful to look at. His handsome shoulders, firm and polished, and pearly with drops of water, shone like submerged marble; the amorous wave shimmered with pleasure as it touched his fair body, and suspended silver pearls from his arms. The aquatic plants, which he had put into his hair, set off its bright lustrous black with their pale, glaucous green. He might have been taken for the god of the river in person.

Musidora could not sufficiently admire that beauty superior to the perfection of the loveliest of women. Neither Phœbus Apollo, the young, radiant god, nor Scamander fatal to virgins, nor Endymion the pale lover of the moon,— none of the ideal forms realised by sculptors or poets could have borne comparison with my hero. He was the last type of manly beauty, which has disappeared from the world since the new era. Phidias himself, or Lysippus, Alexander's sculptor, could not have dreamed of a more pure and more perfect form.

"Why do you not bathe?" said Fortunio to Musidora, as he drew near the boat. "I have been told that you can swim, little one."

"Yes, but those negroes?"

"Those negroes! — what do they matter? Besides, they are not men, they are mutes."

So Musidora undid her dress and slipped into the river. Her long hair floated behind her like a golden mantle, and from time to time her satiny back showed on the surface of the water like the back of a Rubens nymph, and her little heels as rosy as the fingers of dawn. Fortunio and she swam side by side like twin swans, and after describing some graceful curves to break the force of the current, they returned to their point of departure and set foot on the lower steps of the marble stair.

Two handsome mulatto girls awaited them with great wrappers of soft, warm stuff, in which they enveloped themselves.

"Well, my fair naiad," said Fortunio, draped in his wrapper; "do we not look like two antique statues? I am a passable Triton; and the fresh water need no longer envy the salt, — a Venus has arisen from it who is at least as good as the other. Why is there not a Phidias on the shore? The modern world would then have its Venus Anadyomene. But our sculptors are fit only to cut paving-stones or to make deities of illustrious men in frock coats. With this accursed

civilisation, which has no other object than to stick up on a pedestal the aristocracy of cobblers and candle-makers, the feeling for form is being lost; and God will one of these mornings be obliged to get out of his Voltairean arm-chair to make the world over, for it has been destroyed by the numberless cads who hate all splendour and all beauty, and who constitute modern nations. A people which was even slightly civilised, in the true sense of the word, would erect a temple and statue to you, my queenlet; they would make a goddess of you,—the goddess Musidora. That would not sound so badly."

"Married to the god Fortunio, both before the mayor and in the Church of Olympus; else the somewhat prudish divinities would refuse to receive me at their Wednesday or Friday evenings," replied Musidora, laughing.

Chatting thus, the two lovers re-entered the house.

But what of Soudja-Sari? My curious, fair reader, I shall soon tell you something of her.

XXI

The day passed like a lovely dream. Our two lovers enjoyed deeply each other's beauty, and their rosy lips

were the charming cups in which they drank the heady wine of voluptuousness. They kissed but once, but that kiss lasted until night. Musidora laid her burning, velvety cheek against Fortunio's cool breast. She was drawn up on herself in an adorably infantile attitude, like a child that settles in its mother's lap to sleep at ease. She closed her eyes, the lashes of which came down to the middle of her cheeks; then she raised them slowly to look at Fortunio.

"Ah!" she said, after a mute contemplation, and pressing him to her breast with superhuman strength, "the day you cease to love me, I shall kill you."

"Good!" said Fortunio to himself, "this is the one hundred and fifty-third woman who has said the same thing, and I am still in pretty fair health. It will not prevent my enjoying life."

He felt the soft girdle which Musidora had bound around his body suddenly relax. He looked at her and saw her pale, — her head thrown back nervously, her teeth clenched, her lips colourless, as if she were plunged in a paroxysm of rage.

"The devil!" said Fortunio. "Can she be serious? These little, delicate, frail demons are capable of anything. This promises to be amusing. After all,

it is a pretty death, I do not care for any other. No one yet has loved me enough to kill me. It would be rather strange if, after having weathered all the storms of Indian and tropical passions, I should have my throat neatly cut by a fair, clean little Parisian who is just about strong enough to fight a duel with an insect."

"In that case, my queen," he said aloud, "you have just signed my warrant for eternal life. I shall grow older than Methuselah and Melchisedec."

"So you will always love me?" said Musidora, with a long and voluptuous kiss.

"Assuredly. When one loves, it is forever, otherwise what is the good of loving? Does not the infinite involve eternity. I shall adore you in this world and in the next, if there be one, and there must be one expressly for that purpose. Love has scores of eternities at its disposal."

"Oh, you wicked railer, who believe in nothing!" said Musidora with a charming pout.

"I? I believe in everything. I believe in the charity of philanthropists, in the virtue of women, in the good faith of journalists, in the epitaphs on tombstones,—in everything which is most unbelievable.

I wish there could be four persons in the Trinity so that my faith might be more meritorious."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, sir; you are an atheist, which is very bad form," answered Musidora, playing with the amulet that sparkled on Fortunio's neck.

"An atheist? Nay, I have three gods: gold, beauty, and happiness. I am at least as pious as *pius Æneas* of blessed memory."

"Then believe in God; it can do no harm, as old women say when they propose a remedy for headache or toothache."

"Now, look here, heart of mine, are we going to talk theology? I would rather dine and take you to the Opera. I have got to present you to the world. Let us sit down to table and then go."

"How can I go, dressed like this, Fortunio?"

"We will call at your house, and you can put on another gown."

After the dinner, which was no less sumptuous than heretofore, the handsome couple got into the carriage. Musidora stopped at her house and put on a lovely dress. Through a childish caprice, she wore white from head to foot like a young bride. The sweet,

virginal expression of her face, illumined by deep internal felicity, admirably harmonised with her dress.

Fortunio, divining the intention which had suggested the choice of the dress, drew from a small box of red morocco which he had in his pocket, a necklace of perfectly round pearls, and earrings and bracelets, also of pearls, of inestimable value.

"This is my wedding present, Marchioness. You must put on the earrings and bracelets and the necklace. And now, my Infanta, you are perfect, and I will wager that to-night twenty women burst with jealousy. You will cause many a jaundice, and more than one lover will be treated like a negro in consequence of the ill-temper which you will certainly excite in the feminine camp."

When Musidora appeared in her box with Fortunio, a wave of admiration swept through the hall and the audience very nearly broke out into applause. Phœbe, who was in a stage-box with Alfred, turned as pale as the moon when rises the sun; the skin of Arabella, who was after Fortunio's heart, was marked with yellow lines as if her gall had burst, and the violence of her emotion was so great that she nearly fainted.

As for Cynthia the Roman, she smiled gently, and between the acts came with Phœbe to call on Musidora.

"You are so like a bride that you might be taken for one," said Phœbe with a constrained look and a venomous smile.

"I am," said Musidora, "for yesterday I was married to the dream of my heart."

"I thought so," said Cynthia. "Never did a novena with a three-pound candle fail to produce its effect. My Madonna is worth a great deal more than all your rough, bearded saints."

"Madam," said George, who entered the box; "permit me to present my respects to you, if there is any room for them. The carriage is yours. When am I to send it to you?"

"Thank you, George, Fortunio has forestalled you."

"Well, Fortunio," went on George, "have you just come back from Calcutta or from hell? Perhaps it was there that Musidora met you. She is on excellent terms with the devil."

"No, I have come back in the most commonplace way from Neuilly, like a constitutional monarch. Have you had Cynthia framed?"

The Roman girl made a silent negative sign. Phœbe, bending by Fortunio's ear, informed him that Cynthia was in love with a sort of bravo, half swashbuckler, half fencing-master, six feet tall, with black whiskers and three rows of teeth like a crocodile, and that she wasted all her money upon him.

"Just like her," whispered Fortunio.

While this conversation was going on in Fortunio's box, Alfred, left alone, was gazing at Musidora through his glasses.

"Decidedly," he said to himself, "I shall begin to pay court to Musidora,—Phœbe is too cold. It would be in the best of taste to supplant Fortunio, with his fine, satrap-like airs. It would be a brilliant deed, and would restore my reputation as a lady-killer, which needs to be revived, for I cannot conceal from myself the fact that I have missed three women. How the devil can Fortunio meet all the expenses he indulges in? There is something queer about it. He is not known to own a single foot of land. Strange! very strange! excessively strange indeed! But I shall fathom the mystery, and I shall possess Musidora."

Alfred, having come to this praiseworthy decision, felt much satisfied with himself, and repeatedly

passed his white-gloved hand through his curled hair with the most satisfied and victorious look in the world.

XXII

FORTUNIO had allowed himself to share Musidora's passion. True love is as contagious as the plague. Scoffer and sceptic though he appeared to be, he did not suffer from the hardness of heart which is the result of too precocious and too easy enjoyment. He hated worse than death the grimaces of sensibility, and could not be seduced by mincing airs; hypocrisy in love revolted him more than any other. On the other hand, he was touched by the least mark of true affection and would not have treated harshly a ragged beggar or a mangy dog that exhibited real affection for him. Although his vast wealth made it easy for him to obtain possession of all brilliant and splendid realities, the little blue flower of artless love softly bloomed in a corner of his heart. A seraglio of two hundred women and the favours of all the handsome courtesans of the world had in no wise caused him to become *blasé*. He was more of a roué than an octogenarian diplomat, yet more candid than Cherubino at his godmother's feet. He would have led the life of a Don Juan, yet

have enjoyed walking with a boarding-school girl, and wearing an apple-green satin vest on the banks of the Lignon. He calmly yielded to the strangest contradictions and cared nothing at all for logic. His passions led him where they chose, without his ever attempting to resist them. He was good in the morning and wicked at night, and oftener good than wicked, for he was in sound health. He was handsome and rich, and naturally inclined to consider the world well ordered; but unquestionably, whatever his temper might be, he was what he seemed to be. He could perfectly well understand the most opposite things; he was equally fond of scarlet and of sky-blue, but he hated the phraseology of novels and fashionable jargon, and what had chiefly captivated him in Musidora was that she had given herself to him without a word.

Society talked of nothing but the victory won by Musidora over the shy and reserved Fortunio, who had become so singularly tame. The little, green-eyed Parisian kitten had mastered the Indian tiger; she had caged him in her love, the imperceptible wires of which were more solid than iron bars. She seemed to have completely fascinated him, and poor Soudja-Sari must have been greatly neglected; Musidora's tender-

ness triumphed over her beauty. Fortunio behaved with her more as a European than he had done with any other woman since his arrival in France. He went to see her every day, and spent sometimes whole weeks without leaving her. Fortunio the Sultan had assumed the manners of Amadis; a princess could not have been adored more profoundly nor respected more humbly, yet occasionally he had very marked fits of relapses into Asiatic ferocity; the tiger's claws showed sharp and menacing from out the velvet of his paws.

One night when he was with her an extraordinary idea came into his mind. He rose, dressed, took the lamp, which he placed near the fringes of the curtains, and set fire to them with the greatest coolness; then he entered the next room and did the same there. The great tongues of flame were already blackening the ceiling, and a dazzling light penetrated the sleeping eyes of Musidora. She awoke, and seeing her room full of fire and smoke, uttered a cry of terror.

"Fortunio! Fortunio! save me!"

Fortunio was standing quietly leaning against the mantel-piece, watching the progress of the fire with an air of satisfaction.

"I am stifling!" said Musidora, springing from the

bed and running to the door. "But what are you doing, Fortunio, and why don't you call for help?"

"It is too late," replied he; and taking up Musidora like a little child, he rolled her up in a blanket and carried her away.

The unbearable, suffocating heat would have made the passage through the suite of rooms which composed the apartment difficult and perilous to a man less agile and less vigorous than Fortunio. In a few bounds he reached the last door, went down the stairs with the swiftness of a bird, opened the outer door for himself, for it would have taken too long to waken the porter buried in drunkenness and sleep, and entered with his precious burden a carriage that seemed to be awaiting him. He sat down, placed Musidora on his knee, and the carriage drove off.

The flames had broken through the windows, and the smoke poured out in dense clouds; the whole household was at last awake, and cries of "Fire!" repeated in every key, were heard from one end of the street to the other. Sparks flew up and scintillated like golden spangles against the red background of the conflagration. It looked like a magnificent aurora borealis.

"I wager Jack will not wake until he is quite cooked," said Fortunio, laughing.

Musidora did not reply. She had fainted.

XXIII

When she regained her senses, she found herself lying on a bed at once elegant and simple. Fortunio was seated by her side.

The interior of the room was most charming and coquettish. The furniture betokened an exquisite taste. It was not that regal and almost insolent luxury which dazzles more than it charms, but a sweet, chastely diaphanous luxury which satisfied the soul even more than the eye. The upholsterer who had designed the room must have been a great poet: it was Fortunio.

"What do you think of this little nest? Is it to your taste?"

"Quite," replied Musidora; "but to whom does this house belong? Where am I?"

"That is a foolish question. You are at home."

"At home!" said Musidora, astonished.

"Yes, I bought this house, for I intended to burn

yours," replied Fortunio carelessly, as if he had said the most natural thing in the world.

"What! It was you who set fire to my house?"

"I wisely considered that the fire would not break out of itself, so I set it."

"Are you mad, Fortunio, or making fun of me?"

"Neither. Have I said anything nonsensical? The architecture of your building was of the Doric order, which is particularly abhorrent to me, — and then —"

"And then what? That is a nice reason to set fire to a whole quarter perhaps," said Musidora, seeing that Fortunio had stopped in the middle of his sentence.

"And then," went on Fortunio, whose complexion had assumed a greenish tinge, and whose eyes had lighted up. "I would not see you longer in a house which had been given you by another and where others had possessed you. It made me ill; I hated every arm-chair, every piece of furniture as if it had been my mortal foe, for in each I saw a kiss or a caress. I could have stabbed your sofa as if it had been a man. Your rings, your dresses, your gems, produced on me the same cold and venomous sensation as the touch of a serpent's skin. Everything in your house recalled to me thoughts that I wanted to drive away forever;

but they returned more importunate and more obstinate than swarms of wasps, and drove into my heart their poisoned stings. You cannot imagine with what vengeful satisfaction I saw the flames lick up those impure draperies, which had before my day cast their perfidious, soft light upon so many voluptuous scenes. How madly the fire embraced the hated walls, and how well it seemed to share my fury! Honest fire, which purifies everything! Thy rain of sparks, of burning flame, fell upon me fresher than the dew of a May morning, and I felt the peace of my heart renewed as under a beneficent shower. Now there cannot be a single wall left standing; all has fallen or is ruined; there is nothing left but a mass of ashes and coals. I breathe more freely, I feel my breast dilate. But you still wear that wrapper, more odious than Dejanira's robe. I must tear it into a thousand pieces and trample it under foot as if it were living." And Fortunio tore off the wrapper, threw it upon the ground, and trampled upon it with the mad rage of a bull which tosses with its horns the scarlet banner abandoned by the *chulos*.

Musidora, terrified by this wild-beast-like madness, had curled herself up under her blanket, her arms

crossed on her bosom, and awaited with mute anxiety the close of this strange scene.

"Ah! I should like to flay you alive," said Fortunio, drawing near the bed.

The girl was terrified for a moment lest he should carry out his intention; but the young and ill-tamed jaguar continued thus: —

"Your soft, satin skin, on which your lovers' lips, swollen by debauch, have been pressed, — I could tear it from your body with delight. I wish no one had ever seen you, touched you, or heard you; I could break the mirrors in which your image has been reflected for a few seconds. I am jealous of your father, for his blood is in your body, and flows freely through the lovely network of your veins; I am jealous of the air you breathe, and which seems to kiss you; of your shadow, which follows you like a tender lover. I must have your whole life, past, present, and future. I do not know why I refrain from killing George and de Marcilly, and having Willis dug up to throw his body to the dogs."

While thus speaking, Fortunio roamed around the room like one of those lean wolves which may be seen in menageries moving around their cage and rubbing

their black noses against the bars. He was silent, raged round the room a few times more, and then fell upon his face on the bed, weeping bitterly. The storm which had begun with thunder was turning into rain.

"You madman! How is it you do not feel that I have never loved any one but you," said Musidora, taking his head and drawing it to her heart. "Oh, my beloved! I was born on the day I found you. My life dates from the day of our love. Why should you be jealous of Musidora? You know very well that she is dead. Are you not my god, my maker, have you not made me out of nothing? Why should you torment yourself?"

"Forgive me, my angel, I was brought up very close to the sun, in a land of fire. I go to extremes in everything, and my passions roar in my soul as lions in their dens. But it is striking three o'clock. Close your eyes, my little crocodile, — go to sleep, Miss."

XXIV

I PROMISED my fair readers to discover Soudja-Sari, the Javanese beauty with the languorous eyes. As she now happens to be the oppressed heroine, since Fortunio loves Musidora, interest naturally is concentrated upon

her. But it was rash of me to make a promise so difficult to fulfil. I have no means of finding Soudja-Sari other than to follow Fortunio, and how am I going to follow on foot a young fellow drawn by thorough-bred horses? And besides, have I the right to spy upon my hero? Is it decent to insinuate myself thus into the secrets of a well-bred man? Is it his fault that I have taken him for the hero of my tale? There are so many others who are glad enough to print their private correspondence.

Yet at any cost I must find Soudja-Sari, the beauty with the languorous eyes. I here renounce all the artifices usually employed by novelists to excite and create interest, and being warned, besides, that it will soon be time to write the glorious word "Finis," I proceed to betray Fortunio's secret.

As I have said, Fortunio was brought up in India by his uncle, a nabob enjoying untold wealth. After his uncle's death he came to France, bearing with him enough to purchase a kingdom. One of his greatest pleasures was to mingle barbaric and civilised life, to be at one and the same time a satrap and a dandy, Beau Brummel and Sardanapalus; he enjoyed having one foot in India and the other in France.

To carry out this double purpose, this is what he had done. He had purchased, in a very retired quarter of Paris, a whole block of houses, the centre of which was filled with great gardens. He had torn down all the inner buildings, and had left to his block of houses merely a thin crust of façades. All the windows looking upon the gardens had been carefully walled up, so that it was impossible to perceive from any side the buildings erected by Fortunio unless one passed overhead in the car of a balloon. Four houses, one at each corner of the block, served as entrances. Long, vaulted passages led to them and afforded communication with the outer world without exciting suspicion. Fortunio went out and came in sometimes through one, sometimes through another, so as not to be noticed. A dealer in provisions, the back of whose shop communicated with the buildings, and who was merely a devoted servant of Fortunio's, enabled provisions to be brought in in a natural and plausible manner.

It was in that unknown palace, more undiscoverable than El Dorado sought by Spanish adventurers, that Fortunio disappeared in the mysterious way which so greatly excited his friends' curiosity. There he spent a week, a fortnight or a month, as his fancy dictated,

without showing outside. The workmen employed in erecting the building had been richly compensated for keeping the secret, but had been scattered in different parts of the globe; not one of them had been left in Paris. Fortunio had sent them off without their being aware of the fact, some to America, others to India and Africa; he had proposed to them wonderful opportunities of bettering their lot, which seemed to arise fortuitously and of which they had been completely the dupes.

El Dorado, the golden palace, as Fortunio baptised it, did not belie its name. Gold shone in it everywhere, and Nero's Golden House assuredly could not have been more magnificent.

Imagine a vast court surrounded by spiral columns of white marble with gilded capitals and shafts, entwined with a vine, also gilded, the grapes formed of rubies. Into this quadruple portico opened the exquisitely carved cedar doors of the apartments. From the centre of the court plunged down four porphyry stairs, with balustrades and landings, leading to a basin, the sparkling, deep water of which could be lowered to the lowest steps or raised to the level of the ground, according to the depth desired. The rest of the space

was filled with orange-trees, tulip-trees, yellow-flowered angsokas, palms, aloes, and all manner of tropical plants growing in the open ground. In order to make this wonder intelligible, I add that El Dorado was a palace under glass. Fortunio, who was as chilly as a Hindoo, had, in order to secure an atmosphere such as he liked, first caused to be built a vast hot-house which completely enclosed his wondrous nest. A glass vault replaced the sky; and yet he did not lack rain on that account. When he wished to change the "set fair" of his crystalline atmosphere, he ordered rain, and rain at once fell. Invisible tubes full of holes poured down a shower of fine pearls upon the leaves, fan-shaped or quaintly cut, of his virgin forest.

Thousands of humming-birds and birds of paradise flew freely in the vast cage, shining in the air like winged, living flowers. Peacocks with lapis-lazuli necks and ruby aigrettes proudly dragged their starry tails over the sward.

A second court contained the lodgings of the slaves.

An inevitable disadvantage of the building was that it had no view. Fortunio, who had a very inventive mind and who was never put out by anything, had remedied this. The windows of his drawing-room

looked out upon dioramas painted in marvellous fashion, and causing the most perfect illusion. One day it was Naples with its blue sea, its amphitheatre of white houses, its volcano crowned with flames, its golden, flowery islands; another day it was Venice, with the marble domes of San Giorgio, the Dogana, or the Ducal Palace; or else, if my Lord Fortunio happened to be in a pastoral mood, a Swiss view; but usually Asiatic prospects, Benares, Madras, Mazulipatam, and other picturesque places. His valet would enter his room in the morning and say, "What country will you have to-day, sir?"

"What have you ready?" Fortunio would answer. "Let me see the list."

The valet would hold out to Fortunio a mother-of-pearl notebook on which the names of the landscapes and cities were carefully engraved. Fortunio marked a view which he had not yet seen or which he desired to enjoy again, just as if he were ordering an ice.

He enjoyed life there like a rat in a Dutch cheese, indulging in all the refinements of Asiatic luxury, waited on by slaves on bended knee, adored like a god, beheading with a perfect dexterity, that would have done honour to a Turkish executioner, those

who displeased him or served him awkwardly. The bodies were thrown into a well filled with quicklime and at once destroyed. But for some time past, no doubt influenced by European ideas, he had more rarely indulged in this sort of pleasure, unless he were drunk or sought to distract Soudja-Sari.

Before entering El Dorado he threw off his fashionable clothes and resumed his Indian dress : a gown and turban of gold-flowered muslin, slippers of yellow morocco, and a creese with diamond-studded handle.

None of the Hindoos, men or women, who were shut up in the splendid prison, knew a word of French, and they were all perfectly ignorant of the part of the world in which they happened to be. Neither Soudja-Sari, his favourite, nor Rima-Pahes, who draped herself in her long black hair as in a jet mantle, nor Koukong-Alis, with the rainbow-like eyebrows, nor Sicara with the flower-like mouth, nor Cambana, nor Keni-Tambouhan suspected that they were in Paris, for a very good reason, — they did not even know of the existence of that city. Thanks to this ignorance, Fortunio governed his little world as despotically as if he had been in the very depths of the Indies.

He would spend whole days in perfect immobility, seated upon a pile of cushions, his feet resting upon one of his women, following with a careless glance the blue spirals of smoke that rose from his hookah. He plunged with delight into the voluptuous state of stupor so dear to Orientals, and which is the greatest happiness that one can taste on earth, since it consists of perfect forgetfulness of all human affairs. Dreamy, vague reveries caressed his bent brow with the soft down of their wings; brilliant mirages shimmered before his half-closed eyes. From the broad calyx of the great Indian flowers, natural urns and scent-boxes, rose wild, penetrating perfumes, strong, bitter scents capable of intoxicating like wine or opium. Jets of rose water sprang as high as the carved lintels of the arcades, and fell in showers of spray within their rock-crystal basins with melodious murmur; to crown all this magnificence, the sun, illumining the glass vault, gave to the golden palace a diamond sky. It was the realisation of a fairy tale. Within it one was two thousand miles from Paris, in the recesses of the Orient, in the very depths of the "Thousand and One Nights;" and yet the muddy, vile, noisy street roared and swarmed within a few steps; the

dim light of the lamp of the Commissary of Police swung from the end of a post in the fog; the booksellers sold the five Codes, with their edges of various colours; the Constitutional Charter opened its tricoloured flowers in the shape of cockades; the atmosphere of hydrogen gas and molasses characteristic of civilisation was breathed by passers-by who waded through a slough of muddiest roads. Noise, smoke, rain, ugliness, wretchedness, yellow faces under a gray sky, — in a word, the hideous, ignoble Paris which you all know.

But on the other side of the wall a little sparkling, warm, golden, harmonious, scented world; a world of women, birds, and flowers; an enchanted palace which Fortunio the wizard had known how to make invisible in the very centre of Paris, a city not favourable to prodigies; a poet's dream carried out by a poetic millionaire, who is as rare as a millionaire poet, blooming like a marvellous flower of Arabian tales. On one side work, with its bare, blackened arms, its breast heaving like a blacksmith's bellows; on the other, soft leisure carelessly leaning on its elbow; delicate idlesse with its white, frail hands, recovering during the day from the fatigue of having slept all night; the most

perfect quietness by the side of the most feverish agitation; a complete antithesis.

In this way did Fortunio lead a double life, enjoying both Asiatic and Parisian luxury. His mysterious retreat was a poetic nest where from time to time he indulged in his dreams. There were his only loves, for he could not put up with European manners and the constant mingling of the sexes. He was inclined to the opinion of the Sultan Schariar, that nothing was pleasanter than to buy a young maid and to have her beheaded after the first night. This simple plan prevented any possible treachery. He did not, however, carry his jealous precautions so far, though he felt it impossible to love any woman who had had another lover. Undoubtedly, if he had ever married, he would never have wedded a widow. Musidora was the only woman with whom he had carried on an intrigue so long; he had yielded to the penetrating charm, to the transcendent coquetry, and especially to the true love of the girl. The warm flame of her passion had softened his heart; he loved her, and yet he was unhappy for the first time in his life. Unbearable remembrances harried his soul, and in the midst of the sweetest kisses he tasted hideous bitterness: he always remembered that she

had been possessed by others. His power for once failed him; he could not wipe away the former life of Musidora and purify her, and the thought clung to him like a vulture. He was so accustomed to exclusive possession that he found it difficult to understand that there were other men in the world besides himself. When anything reminded him that others could have been loved as he was, he entered into fiendish rages and would have torn lions in twain, so transported was he by fury. At such times he felt an irresistible need to mount on horseback, to leap into a crowd, and with great sword-cuts to slash off arms, legs, and heads. He uttered dreadful howls, and rolled on the ground like a madman. It was in one of these fits of jealous rage that he had set fire to Musidora's house. But for this, he was as impassible as an old Turk; had the lightning fallen and lighted his pipe, he would not have expressed the least surprise. He feared neither God nor devil, death nor life, and he was possessed of the finest coolness in the world.

Fortunio, spellbound by the enchanter Musidora, had appeared only at rare intervals in El Dorado; for nearly a week he had not set foot in it. A crushing weariness weighed down upon the glass sky of that little

world the sun of which was hidden. As none of the inhabitants of El Dorado knew where he was, any conjectures as to the motives which kept him away were impossible. They did not know whether he was elephant hunting or making war against a rajah. Brought directly from India without having landed, they did not suppose that the manners of the country in which they were differed in any respect from the manners of Benares or Madras.

Soudja-Sari, restless and sad, lived withdrawn within her apartment with her women. It is to be regretted that none of our painters ever saw Soudja-Sari, for she was the daintiest and loveliest creature imaginable, and words, however well combined, give but an imperfect idea of a woman's beauty.

Soudja-Sari might have been thirteen years of age, though she seemed to be fifteen, so well formed was she and so delicately full were her contours. A single pale, warm tone spread from her brow to her feet; her skin, mat and pulpy like a camellia leaf, was softer to the touch than the internal membrane of an egg; certain transparent forms of amber could alone give an idea of her colour. It is difficult to imagine anything more piquant than the blond fairness of her virgin body

covered with a thick mantle of hair as black as night, falling straight from her head to her heels. The roots of her hair, planted in the golden skin of her brow, formed a sort of charmingly quaint bluish penumbra. The long black eyes, rising slightly toward the temples, were full of inexpressible voluptuousness and languor, and the eyeballs passed from one side to the other with an irresistibly sweet, harmonious movement. Soudja-Sari was well named. When her velvet glance rested upon you, you felt in your heart an infinite idlesse, a calm full of freshness and perfume, a sort of joyful melancholy. The will yielded, projects vanished like smoke, and one desired only to remain forever lying at her feet; all things seemed useless and vain, and naught on earth worth doing save to love and sleep. Yet Soudja-Sari had violent passions, as violent as the perfumes and poisons of her native country.

Her fine, delicate nose, her blooming lips red like the cactus flower, her broad hips, her small feet and hands, — all marked her as thorough-bred and remarkably strong.

Fortunio had purchased her when she was nine years old, paying three oxen for her. She had had no difficulty in emerging from the crowd of beauties in his

seraglio and becoming his favourite. Fortunio, no doubt, had not been faithful to her; that was impossible with his ideas and in view of Oriental manners, but he had always remained constant. Never until he had met Musidora had he felt for any one such quick and passionate desire, and the kitten with the sea-green eyes was the only woman that had ever rivalled Soudja-Sari's face in my hero's heart.

Seated on a carpet, Soudja-Sari was looking at herself in a little mirror made of specular iron with a handle of exquisitely chased gold. Four women, kneeling around her, were tressing her hair which they had divided among themselves, and in which they plaited golden threads. A fifth, seated farther away was gently tickling her back with a little hand of carved jade set at the end of an ivory wand.

Keni-Tambouhan and Koukong-Alis drew from cedarwood chests — the wardrobes of our princess — gowns and precious stuffs: black satins covered with fanciful flowers, the pistils formed of peacocks' aigrettes and the petals of butterflies' wings; brocades with grainy woof starred and dotted with luminous points; light velvets; silks more changeable than the neck of dove or the fire opal; muslins ribbed with

gold and silver and ornamented with elegant designs, — the wardrobe of a fairy or a peri.

They spread all these splendours upon divans, so that Soudja-Sari may choose the robe she will wear that day. Rima-Pahes, whose long hair, tressed in Japanese fashion, is twisted around two golden pins with silver balls, kneels before Soudja-Sari and exhibits to her various gems contained in a small malachite coffer. But Soudja-Sari is uncertain; she does not know whether to take her chrysoberyl necklace or the azerodrach beads. She tries them in turn, and ends by choosing a small string of rose pearls, for which she soon substitutes three rows of coral. Then, as if worn out by so much labour, she leans back upon the knees of one of her women and lets fall her arms, the palms open, turned upwards, like a person worn out by lassitude. She closes her eyelids fringed with long lashes, and lets her head fall backwards. The four slaves, who have not yet finished tressing, draw near so as not to pull her hair, but one of them not having been quick enough, Soudja-Sari utters a cry more shrill than the hissing of an asp which has been trodden upon, and sits up with an abrupt, quick motion. The slave turns pale on seeing Soudja-Sari trying to draw from

Rima-Pahes' hair one of the long gold needles by which it is kept up; for one of the habits of the lady is to plant these pins in the breast of her women when they do not fulfil their functions with all desirable lightness. However, as the needle does not come out at once, Soudja-Sari resumes her nonchalant pose, and closes her eyes again. The slave breathes once more, and Soudja-Sari's toilet is completed without further incident.

This is how she was dressed: A pair of very full trousers, with black stripes on a tawny gold ground, fell from her hips to just above her ankles. A sort of jacket or very narrow waist, resembling the *strophia* and the *cestus* of antiquity, fastened top and bottom by two jewelled clasps, set off the rich contours of her round brown breasts, the upper portion of which was seen through the opening of the garment. This vest was of gold stuff with figures and flowers embroidered in gems; the foliage with emeralds, the roses with rubies, the blue flowers with turquoises. It was sleeveless, and showed the exquisite form of two lovely arms. The piquancy and singularity of this Javanese costume was due to there being quite a space between the bust and the girdle, so that her dimpled hips, more

polished and shining than marble, and her supple loins, as shapely as those of a Greek statue of the finest period, were visible.

Her hair was divided, as I have said, in four long tresses twined with gold threads, which fell down to her feet, two in front and two behind; a camboja flower bloomed on either side of her polished, transparent temples, on which was a network of delicate veins similar to that on the temples of the portrait of Anne Boleyn, and on the tips of her pearly ears, exquisitely shaped, sparkled two scarabei, the golden-green wing-sheaths of which were coloured with all sorts of tints of unimaginable richness. A great scarf of Indian muslin, with a pattern of sprigs of flowers worked in gold, wound carelessly around her body, softened by its vapoury whiteness the over-brilliancy of the costume. Her feet were bare, each toe covered with diamond rings, and her ankles adorned with golden anklets. On her arms she wore three bracelets, two close to the shoulder and the other on the wrist.

In case she wished to walk and to go down to the garden, — a fancy that rarely seized her, —there was placed by the side of a divan a pair of slippers

wonderfully delicate and small, with the points curved inward after the Siamese fashion.

Having finished dressing, she called for a pipe and began to smoke opium. Rima-Pahes dropped with a silver needle upon the porcelain mushroom the pastille which had been liquified in the flame of scented wood, while Keni-Tambouhan softly waved two great fans of the feathers of the Argus pheasant, and the beautiful Cambana, seated upon the ground, sang, accompanying herself on a guzla with three cords, the pantoum of the dove of Patani and the vultures of Bendam.

The blue, aromatic smoke of the opium escaped in light puffs from Soudja-Sari's red lips as she sank deeper and deeper in the delightful forgetfulness of all things. Rima-Pahes had already renewed the pastille six times.

"More," said Soudja-Sari, in the imperious tone of a spoiled child who would be given the moon if it fancied it.

"No, mistress," replied Rima-Pahes; "you know very well that Fortunio has forbidden your smoking more than six pipes." And she went out, bearing with her the precious golden box that contained the voluptuous poison.

"You wicked Rima-Pahes, to take away my box of opium! I wanted to sleep until my Fortunio returned. At least I should see him in my dreams. What is the use of being awake and alive when he is absent? Never did he stay away hunting so long. What can have happened to him? Perhaps he has been bitten by a serpent or wounded by a tiger."

"Not much!" said Fortunio, raising the portière. "It is I who bite serpents and wound tigers."

At the sound of the well-known voice, Soudja-Sari rose from her divan and cast herself into Fortunio's arms with a movement like that of a young fawn unexpectedly wakened. She passed her two hands around her lover's neck and clung to his lips with the mad avidity of a traveller who has crossed the desert without quenching his thirst; she pressed him to her breast, wound around him like an adder; she seemed to desire to envelop him with her body at every point at once.

"Oh, my dear lord," she said, seating herself on her knees; "if you only knew how much I have suffered during your absence! You bore away my heart with your last kiss, and you did not leave me yours, wicked man! I was as one dead, or sunk in sleep. My tears

alone, falling in silent drops down my cheeks, proved that I still existed. When you are away, O Fortunio of my heart, it seems to me as though the sun had died out in the solitary heavens; the brightest light is as dark to me as the shadows of night; everything is solitary. You alone are light, motion, life! Without you nothing exists. Would I could melt and lose myself in your life! Would I could be you to possess you more entirely!"

"This young woman expresses herself very well in Hindustani. It is a pity she does not know French; she could write novels, and would be a very agreeable bluestocking," said Fortunio to himself, as he untied Soudja-Sari's tresses while playing with them.

"Will my gracious sultan take a sherbet, chew betel, or drink arrack punch? Would he prefer preserved Chinese ginger or a prepared nutmeg?" said the Javanese, raising her soft eyes to his face.

"Have everything brought in. I feel a regal desire to get horribly drunk. You, Keni-Tambouhan, shall play on the tympanon; you, Cambana, shall work your claws upon your pumpkin with the broom-handle stuck in it; and the whole of you shall make noise enough to deafen the devil. It is long since I have enjoyed

myself. Rima-Pahes, while I sing and drink, shall tickle the sole of my feet with a peacock's feather; Fatme and Zuleika shall dance, and afterwards we shall have a fight between a lion and a tiger. Every one who is not dead drunk within two hours shall be beheaded or impaled, as he or she pleases. I have spoken."

A swarm of little black, red, yellow, and piebald slaves arrived, bearing silver platters on their finger-tips and carved vases upon their heads. In three minutes everything was ready.

Each group of women had its table, or rather its carpet, covered with bowls filled with preserves. The service was carried on in Oriental fashion. From time to time Fortunio cast to these beauties dried fruit mixed with gold and silver almonds that contained some gem, and he laughed heartily at the efforts they made to seize them. Never did the eyes of the Greeks, who adored lovely forms, gaze upon more graceful athletes, or behold more beautiful bodies in more varied and happy attitudes. The groups were admirable in their arrangement, interlaced like adders, and supple as Proteus.

"Come!" said Fortunio to Koukong-Alis, "do not bite. Look at that little scorpion waving its claws!

If you make Sacara cry again, I will have you hung by the hair. Come here, Sacara; instead of one silver almond, you shall have a handful."

Sacara, smiling through her tears, cast a glance of triumph at Koukong-Alis, who remained gloomy and sombre in her place. Fortunio filled the fold of her dress with the precious fruit, kissed her, and made her sit down by him on the divan.

The two almehs advanced, swaying their hips, and danced until they fell on the floor breathless and half dead. The lion and the tiger fought with such fierceness that there was very little left of the pair. Arrack and opium performed their work so well that no one kept his or her senses beyond the prescribed time. Fortunio fell asleep on Soudja-Sari's bosom.

Musidora waited for him all night, and slept but little.

XXV

It would seem that Fortunio was very comfortable in his gilded nest, for Musidora waited for him in vain for a week.

The cause of this sudden rupture was that Fortunio had recognised that there existed between Musidora

and him an inexhaustible source of bitterness. He thought her charming, clever, entirely worthy of being loved, but he could not forget the past; his retrospective jealousy was always awake; he would have been miserable beyond conception without in the least contributing to Musidora's happiness. He had made the greatest efforts to overcome the ever-present thought, but it always sprang up more venomous and obstinate. Feeling that the very efforts he made to forget compelled him to remember, he preferred to give up the useless struggle. If he had loved Musidora less, he would have kept her; he loved her too much to allow a secret thought to exist between them. With his firm character, he soon came to an irrevocable decision. Musidora received a letter containing an annuity of twenty-five thousand livres, together with a lock of Fortunio's hair, and these words written in an unknown hand: —

"MADAM, — The Marquis Fortunio has just been killed in a duel. Remember him sometimes."

"Oh!" said Musidora, "he did not come, — so he must have been dead. I had guessed it. But I shall not long survive him." And without shedding a tear,

she fetched the pocket-book in which was the poisoned needle that Fortunio had taken from her at the beginning of their loves, mistrusting her impulsive character, and which she had found forgotten at the bottom of a casket.

"It was a fatal omen, and chance was clear-sighted when it made me find an instrument of death where I looked only for love letters and a means of beginning a frivolous intrigue."

With these words she kissed the lock of Fortunio's hair and pricked herself in the throat with the point of the needle. Her eyes closed, her rosy lips turned blue, a shudder shook her lovely frame. She was dead.

XXVI

"My dear Radin Mantri, — I shall very shortly follow this letter. I return to India, which I shall probably never leave again.

"You may remember with what eagerness I desired to visit Europe, the country of civilisation, as it is called. Heaven forgive me! If I had known what it was, I should never have put myself out for it.

"At present I am in France, a wretched country,

and in Paris, a mean city. It is difficult to enjoy one's self properly here. To begin with, it is always raining, and the sun only shines with a flannel vest and a cotton cap on, — it looks like an old fellow stiff with rheumatism. The trees have very small leaves, and only for three months. There is no hunting save rabbits, or at most, a few wretched wild boars, or wolves which have not the strength to devour a dozen peasants.

"The men are horribly ugly, and the women — oh! ah! The rich people, or at least, those who claim to be so, have not even a twenty-five-franc piece in their pocket, and if when out driving it occurs to them to back their carriage into a shop-window, or to run over a fool or two, they are obliged to leave their hat in pledge or to go and borrow money from one of their friends.

"There is a certain class of young fellows who are called fashionables. They lead the most curious life. The dress of the most elegant of them is not worth a thousand francs, and generally they are in debt for it. Their supreme refinement consists in wearing patent-leather boots and white gloves. A pair of boots costs forty francs, a pair of gloves from three to five francs,

— marvellous luxury, is it not? Their clothes are made of cloth very like that worn by janitors, dealers in salads, and barristers; it is very difficult to tell a nobleman or a rich man's son from a teacher of writing in twenty-four lessons.

" These gentlemen dine in two or three cafés which are approved by fashion, where everybody can go, and where you run the risk of being seated at the same table as a writer of bad vaudevilles or of newspaper articles who has just received his month's pay and proposes to make up for an eight-days' fast. The cafés are the worst eating-houses in the world. You cannot get anything in them. You call for a bison's hump or an elephant's foot, and the waiter looks at you amazed, as if you had said something extraordinary. Their turtle-soup rarely contains shells, and you cannot find in their cellars a single drop of genuine Tokay or Shiraz wine.

" After dinner, these fashionables go to a place called the Opera, a sort of barracks of wood and canvas, with faded gilding, and daubs like painted paper, sufficiently fine to exhibit acrobatic monkeys and learned asses in. It is considered good taste to sit in one of the oblong boxes which are close to four big

pillars in repulsive Corinthian style, and which are not even of marble. It is impossible to see anything from these boxes, and that is probably why they are more sought after than any others. I asked myself frequently what pleasure one experienced there. It seems that the amusement consists in watching the legs of the dancers. These legs are usually very poor and covered with stuffed tights. The rest of the time there is a great deal of noise which is called music. The play is always the same, and the lines are written by the worst poets to be found.

"When there is no opera, you walk about with a cigar on the boulevard, which is not two hundred yards long, has no shadow, no coolness, and where you tread upon your neighbour's feet. Or else you go to a party.

"To go to a party is one of the most inexplicable pleasures of civilisation. This is it. You assemble four hundred people in a room where one hundred would be uncomfortable. The men are dressed in black like undertakers; the women wear the most astonishing costumes possible, — gauze, ribbons, ears of corn in imitation gold, the whole business worth some fifteen francs. Their dresses, which are pitilessly

cut low, exhibit unspeakably wretched contours. Everybody remains standing, stuck against the wall; the women are seated separately. Nobody speaks to them excepting a few aged, bald, pot-bellied individuals. A piano, which is an execrable invention, piteously maunders in a corner, and the shrill singing of some famous singer rises from time to time above the low murmur of the assembly. Hostlers and porters disguised as lackeys bring in a few cakes and glasses of tasteless mixtures, at which everybody dashes with disgusting avidity. The people who are best off dance themselves, as if they could not afford to pay for dancers.

"You would be very much astonished, my good Radin Mantri, to see civilisation closer. It consists in having newspapers and railways. The newspapers are great, square pieces of paper which are scattered through the city in the morning. They appear to have been printed with boot-blacking, and contain accounts of the events which have occurred in the city: dogs drowned, husbands beaten by their wives, and remarks on the condition of the cabinets of Europe, written by people who do not know how to write and whom one would not take for valets.

"The railways are grooves on which kettles gallop along, — a most entertaining spectacle!

"Besides the newspapers and the railways, there is a sort of constitutional mechanism, with a king who reigns and does not govern. When the poor devil of a king needs a million, he is obliged to ask it of three hundred country louts who meet at the end of a bridge and talk the year through without paying any attention to what other speakers have said. A speech on molasses is replied to by a philippic on fresh-water fishing. That is the way Europeans live.

"Their private manners are still more strange. You may call on their women at any hour of the day or night; they go to walk or to balls with the first comer; jealousy seems to be unknown to these people.

"The peers of France, generals, and diplomats generally take for mistresses opera dancers as thin as spiders, who betray them in favour of wig-makers, machinists, writers, or negroes. They know it very well, yet are not put out with them, — instead of having them sewn up in sacks and cast into the river, as would be proper.

"A singular and wide-spread taste among this people is love for old women. Almost all the actresses adored and run after by the public are at least sixty years of age. They have to be about fifty before any one finds out that they are pretty and have talent.

"As for the arts, their condition is far from being brilliant. All the fine pictures in the galleries are by old masters. There is, however, in Paris a poet whose name ends in *go* (Victor Hugo), who seems to me to do pretty good work, — but after all, I like King Soudraka, the author of 'Vasantesena,' just as much.

"I have not enjoyed myself greatly in Europe. The only pleasant thing I have met with is a little girl called Musidora, whom I should have liked to carry off to put into my seraglio; but with her stupid European ideas she would have been very unhappy in it, and I hate nothing more than to see long faces.

"I shall start in a few days. I have chartered three vessels to carry away what is worth taking, and I shall burn the rest. El Dorado shall disappear like a dream, — one or two barrels of powder will do the business.

"Farewell, old Europe, — old, though you think yourself young. Try to invent a steam engine to manufacture beautiful women, and to find a new gas to take the place of the sun. I am going to the East. It is simpler."

One of Cleopatra's Nights

ONE OF CLEOPATRA'S NIGHTS

I

ABOUT nineteen hundred years ago a magnificent barge, gilded and painted, was flying down the Nile, impelled by fifty long, flat sweeps that rayed the surface of the water like the feet of a gigantic scarabæus. The barge, of slender proportions and admirably designed for speed, was long and narrow, and turned up at each end in the shape of the crescent of the young moon. The ram's-head surmounted by a gilded ball, placed at the point of the prow, denoted that the craft belonged to a personage of royal race. In the centre of the vessel rose a flat-roofed cabin, a sort of *naos* or tent of honour, painted and gilded, with a palmetto moulding and four small, square windows. Two cabins, also covered with hieroglyphs, were placed at each end of the crescent. One, larger than the other, had an upper story of less height, like the forecastle of the quaint galleys

of the sixteenth century drawn by Della Bella. The smaller, which was the pilot's, ended in a triangular pediment.

The rudder was formed of two huge sweeps fastened to posts painted with stripes, and showed in the water behind the barge like the web feet of a swan. Heads wearing the pschent and having on the chin the allegorical beard, were carved on the handle-ends of these great sweeps, which were worked by the pilot standing on his cabin roof.

The pilot was a dark-complexioned man, tawny like new bronze, with eyes slightly slanting at the outer corners, and full of bluish reflections, hair plaited into small cords, open mouth and prominent cheekbones, ears standing out from his head; in a word, a man of true Egyptian type. A narrow waistcloth wrinkling on his hips, and five or six strings of glass beads and amulets formed his costume. He appeared to be the only living person on the barge, for the rowers, bending to their sweeps and concealed by the plank-sheer, could only be guessed at by the symmetrical motion of the oars, which opened on either side of the barge like the leaves of a fan and struck the water after a slight pause.

There was not a breath of air, and the great triangular sail, furled and stopped with a silken cord around the mast, which had been unshipped, proved that all hope of seeing the wind rise had been given up. The noonday sun poured down in fiery beams; the ashen, dry mud on the river-bank reverberated the heat; a crude, dazzling light, dusty, so intense was it, overspread everything with its torrents of flame; the blue sky whitened in the heat like metal in a furnace; a hot, dun mist smoked on the burning horizon. Not a cloud showed on the unchanging sky, as mournful as eternity.

The water of the Nile, colourless and dead, seemed to sleep on its course, and spread out in sheets of molten tin. No breath rippled its surface, or bowed on their stems the flowers of the lotus, still as if carved out of stone. Only from time to time the leap of a bechir or a fahaka made it sparkle like silver; the sweeps of the barge appeared to find it difficult to tear the dusky pellicle of the coagulated waters.

The banks were deserted. Immense, solemn melancholy brooded over the land, always a vast tomb, in which the living seemed to have no other occupation than to embalm the dead. An arid gloom, dry as

pumice stone, without softness or reverie, without a pearly gray cloud to watch on the horizon, without a secret spring in which to bathe its dusty feet; the gloom of a sphinx weary of gazing forever at the desert, but which cannot leave the granite pedestal on which it has been sharpening its claws for twenty centuries.

The silence was so deep that it was as though the world had become mute or the air had lost the power of conveying sound. The only murmur heard was the low whisper and laugh of the crocodiles weltering in the heat and wallowing amid the river reeds; or else some ibis, tired of standing one leg under its wing and its neck sunk between its shoulders, abandoned its motionless pose, and suddenly striking the blue air with its white wings, flew away and perched upon an obelisk or a palm tree.

The barge sped like an arrow over the water, leaving behind it a silver wake that soon was effaced; a few frothy bubbles breaking on the surface alone testified to the passage of the craft, already out of sight. The river banks, yellow and salmon-coloured, unrolled rapidly like papyrus bands between the double azure of the heaven and the water, these so alike in tone that

the thin tongue of earth which separated them seemed a causeway built across an immense lake, and made it difficult to decide whether the Nile reflected the sky or the sky reflected the Nile.

The prospect changed constantly. Sometimes gigantic propylæa mirroring in the river their sloping walls covered with large panels containing quaint figures; pylons with swelling capitals; stairways bordered by great crouching sphinxes wearing caps with fluted lapels and crossing their black basalt paws under their pointed breasts; huge palaces, showing against the horizon the stern, horizontal lines of their entablatures, on which the emblematic disc opened its monstrous wings like an eagle with exaggerated spread of pinions; temples, with enormous columns the size of towers, against the dazzling white background of which stood out processions of hieroglyphic figures, — all the wonders of the Titanic Egyptian architecture. Or again, a landscape desolate in its aridity: hills formed of small pieces of stone, the débris of excavations and constructions, crumbs of the gigantic granite debauch which had lasted for more than thirty centuries; mountains exfoliated by the heat, cut and rayed by black stripes like the marks of a conflagration; deformed hillocks crouching

like the ram-headed sphinxes of the tombs and outlining against the sky their grotesque shapes. Nor was the aridity tempered in any way. No oasis of foliage refreshed the glance; green seemed a colour unknown in nature. Here and there a slender palm blossomed on the horizon, a thorny cactus raised its leaves sharp as bronze swords, a carthamum, finding a little humidity in the shadow of a broken column, broke with its red dot the general monotony.

Having cast this rapid glance upon the landscape, let us return to the fifty-oared barge and enter straight into the *naos* of honour. The interior of it was painted white with green arabesques, vermilion lines, and golden flowers of fantastic shape. A reed matting of extreme fineness covered the floor. At the end stood a sort of small bed with griffin's feet, with the back upholstered like a modern sofa or arm-chair, a footstool with four steps to ascend to it, and — a piece of refinement which strikes our ideas of comfort rather strangely — a sort of crescent of cedar wood mounted on a foot and destined to hold the neck and support the head of the sleeper.

On this strange pillow rested a very lovely head, one glance of whose eyes had wrought woe to half the

world; a head adored and divine; the head of the most perfect woman that ever existed, the most womanly and the most queenly; an admirable type to which poets have been unable to add and which dreamers always find at the end of their dreams. It was Cleopatra.

Near her, Charmian, her favourite slave, waved a broad fan of ibis feathers. A little maid watered with scented water the small reed blinds hung across the windows of the *naos*, in order that the air should enter only impregnated with coolness and perfume.

Near the couch, in a vase of wavy alabaster with slender spout, its slight, graceful shape vaguely recalling the profile of a heron, was plunged a bouquet of lotus flowers, some of a celestial blue, others of a tender rose like the finger-tips of Isis the great goddess.

Cleopatra on that day, either through caprice or policy, was not dressed in Greek fashion. She had just been present at the Panegyrics, and was returning to her summer palace in the Egyptian costume she had worn at the festival. My feminine readers may perhaps desire to know how Queen Cleopatra was dressed on her return from the Hammisi of Hermonthis, where is worshipped the trinity of the god Mandou, the god-

dess Ritho and her son Harphre, and I cannot refuse them this satisfaction.

Queen Cleopatra wore for a head-dress a sort of very light golden helmet formed of the body and wings of the sacred hawk; the wings, falling fan-like on either side of the head, covered her temples and spread down almost over the neck, allowing to emerge through a small cut an ear rosier and more delicately formed than the shell whence rose Venus, whom the Egyptians name Hathor. The bird's tail was in the place where ladies wear their chignons; its body, covered with imbricated feathers, and painted with different enamels, enveloped the upper part of the head, and the neck, gracefully turned towards the front, composed, with the head, a sort of horn dazzling with gems. A symbolical crest in the shape of a tower completed this elegant though curious head-dress. Hair as black as a starless night escaped from under the helmet and fell in long tresses upon fair shoulders, the upper portion of which alone could be seen above a collarette adorned with several rows of serpentine, azerodrach, and chrysoberyl. A robe of lawn with diagonal ribbing, a misty stuff, — woven air, *ventus textilis*, as Petronius has it, — fell like a white vapour around the

beautiful body, the contours of which it delicately softened. The short sleeves fitted close on the shoulder, but were wider near the elbow, and showed a lovely arm and perfectly shaped hand; the arm bound with six circlets of gold, and the hand adorned with a ring representing a scarabæus. A sash, the knotted ends of which fell in front, marked the waist of the loose, easy tunic. A fringed cape completed the costume; and if a few barbaric words do not frighten my readers, I shall add that the dress was called *schenti* and the cape *calasiris*.

I may add that Queen Cleopatra wore very thin, light sandals, turned up at the point and fastened over the instep like the long-pointed shoes of ladies in the Middle Ages.

Yet Queen Cleopatra did not wear the satisfied air of a woman sure of being perfectly beautiful and perfectly dressed. She twisted and turned upon her narrow bed, and her abrupt movements constantly disarranged the folds of her gauze *conopeum*, which Charmian readjusted with inexhaustible patience without ever ceasing to wave her fan.

"I am stifling in this room," said Cleopatra. "If Phtha, the god of fire, had started his furnaces here, it

could not be hotter. The room is like an oven." And she passed the tip of her little tongue over her lips and stretched out her hand like a patient who looks for a cup that is not there.

Charmian, ever attentive, clapped her hands. A black slave, wearing a kilt pleated like an Albanian skirt, and a panther skin thrown over his shoulder, entered as swiftly as an apparition, holding in equilibrium in his left hand a tray laden with cups and slices of watermelon, and in his right a long vase provided with a spout like a teapot. The slave filled one of the cups, pouring from on high with marvellous dexterity, and placed it before the queen. Cleopatra wetted her lips with the drink, and turning upon Charmian her lovely black eyes, unctuous and lighted by a brilliant spark of light, —

"Oh, Charmian," she said, "I am weary."

II

CHARMIAN, foreseeing a confidence, put on an expression of dolorous assent, and drew nearer her mistress.

"I am horribly weary," went on Cleopatra, letting her arms fall as if discouraged and overcome; "Egypt crushes me and bears me down. That implacably

blue sky is more gloomy than the deepest night of Erebus. Never a shadow and never a cloud! Always that red, bloody sun gazing upon me like the eye of a cyclops! See, Charmian, I would give a pearl for a drop of rain. From the burning orb of that bronze sky there has not fallen a single tear upon this desolate land. It is like the covering of a tomb, like the dome of a necropolis, — a sky as dead and dry as the mummies which it covers. It weighs on my shoulders like a cloak that is too heavy; it troubles and worries me; I feel as if I could not rise without striking my head against it. And then the country is truly frightful, — everything sombre, enigmatical, incomprehensible. Imagination gives birth but to monstrous chimeras and vast monuments. I am terrified by its architecture and its art. The colossi, condemned to remain eternally seated, their hands on their knees and their legs caught in the stone, weary me with their stupid immobility; they oppress my eyes and my reason. When will the giant come who is to take them by the hand and relieve them of their watch of twenty centuries? Even granite tires at last. Who is the master they are waiting for to leave the mountain on which they are seated, and to rise in sign of respect?

What invisible flock do these great sphinxes guard, as they crouch like watch-dogs? — for they never close their eyes, and their claws are ever unsheathed. Why do they so obstinately fix their stony glare upon Eternity and the Infinite? What strange secret do their closed lips retain within their breasts? Right or left, whichever way I turn, I see naught but horrid monsters, dogs with men's heads, men with dogs' heads, chimeras born of hideous couplings in the dark depths of passages, — Anubis, Typhon, Osiris, yellow-eyed hawks whose inquisitive glance seems to traverse your heart and to see, beyond you, unnamable things, — a host of horrible animals and gods with scaly wings, hooked beaks, sharp claws, ever ready to devour and seize you if you but cross the threshold of the temple and raise the corner of the veil.

"On the walls, on the pillars, on the ceilings, on the floors, in the palaces, in the temples, in the deepest depths and lowest wells of the necropolis, even in the entrails of the earth, whither light never reaches, where torches die out for lack of air, — everywhere and ever, endless carved and painted hieroglyphs telling in incomprehensible language things now no longer known, which belong doubtless to vanished creations; mighty buried

works in which a whole people was worn out writing a king's epitaph. Mystery and granite — such is Egypt! What a country for a woman and a queen who is young! Nothing but threatening and funereal symbols, — the *pedum*, the *tau*, the allegorical disc, the curled serpent, the scales for the weighing of souls, — the Unknown, Death, and Nothingness! For sole vegetation, stelæ inscribed with strange characters; for avenues of trees, avenues of granite obelisks; for soil, vast granite slabs of which each mountain can furnish but one; for a heaven, granite ceilings, — eternity made palpable, a bitter and incessant sarcasm on the fragility and the shortness of life; stairs made for Titans, which human feet cannot ascend and which have to be climbed by ladders; pillars which a hundred arms could not surround; labyrinths where one's way is lost before exit is found, — the vertigo of enormity, the intoxication of the gigantic, the disorder bred of pride which means at any cost to carve its name on the surface of the earth.

"And then, Charmian, let me tell you, — there is a thought that terrifies me. In other countries on this earth bodies are burned and their ashes are soon mingled with the soil; here the living seem to have no

other occupation than to preserve the dead. Powerful balms preserve them from destruction; they retain their form and their aspect. The soul gone, the frame remains, and under this people lie twenty peoples; each city stands upon twenty stories of tombs, each generation which disappears makes a new population of mummies in a darksome city. Under the father lie the grandfather and the ancestor in their painted and gilded boxes, such as they were during their life; and the more you dig, the more you find. When I think of the multitudes wrapped in bandages, of the swarms of dried-up spectres which fill up the funeral wells and which have been there for two thousand years, face to face, in a silence that nothing breaks, not even the worm of the sepulchre as it crawls past, and which will be found intact after two thousand other years, with their cats and their crocodiles and their ibises and all that lived at the same time with them, — I feel overcome by terror, and I shudder with fear. What do they say, since they yet have lips, and their soul, if the fancy occurred to it, would find the body in the state in which it left it?

"Egypt is indeed a sinister realm and not suited to me, who am gay and joyous. Everything contains a

mummy; it is the heart and the kernel of all things. After a thousand turns, it is there one ends. The pyramids conceal sarcophagi. It is all nothingness and vanity. For in vain they rip open the heavens with gigantic triangles of stone; they cannot lengthen the bodies by one inch.

"How is it possible to rejoice and laugh in such a land, where the only perfume is the bitter odour of naphtha and bitumen boiling in the kettles of the embalmers; where the floor of your chamber sounds hollow because the corridors of hypogea and mummy pits extend even under your alcove? It is pleasant, is it not, to be the queen of mummies, to have no one to chat with but statues in stiff, constrained attitudes? Ah, if to temper this sadness I had at least some passion in my heart, some interest in my life, if I only loved some one or something; if I were loved! But I am not even that, and so I am weary, Charmian. Had I love, this arid, repellent Egypt would be more charming to me than Greece with its gods of ivory, its white marble temples, its woods of rose laurels and its springs of living water. I should not then think of the hideous face of Anubis and of the terrors of the subterranean cities."

Charmian smiled incredulously. "That cannot cause you very great grief, for every one of your glances pierces hearts like the golden arrows of Eros himself."

"How is a queen," replied Cleopatra, "to know whether it is she or her diadem that is loved. The radiance of her starry crown dazzles eyes and hearts. If I were not seated on a throne, should I be as famous and popular as Bacchides or Archenassa, or the first courtesan you could pick up in Athens or Miletus? A queen is something so far from men, raised so high, so apart, so impossible, that no presumption could hope to succeed in such an enterprise. She is no longer a woman; she is an august, sacred, sexless figure which men worship on their knees without loving her, as they worship the statue of a goddess. Who was ever seriously in love with Hera the snowy-armed, with Pallas the green-eyed? Who ever sought to kiss the silvery feet of Thetis or the rosy fingers of Dawn? What lover of divine beauties ever took wing to fly to the golden palaces of heaven? Respect and terror turn souls to stone in our presence, and to be loved by our like, one must descend to the necropolis of which I spoke but now."

Although she made no objection to the reasoning of her mistress, a faint smile flitting over the lips of the Greek slave proved that she did not entirely believe in this inviolability of the royal person.

"Oh!" continued Cleopatra, "would that something might happen to me, — a strange, unexpected adventure! The song of poets, the dances of Syrian slaves, the feasts crowned with roses and prolonged until the dawn, the night hunts with Laconian dogs, the tame lions, the hump-backed dwarfs, the members of the Brotherhood of Inimitables, the combats in the arena, the new dresses, the byssus robes, the strings of pearls, the perfumes of Asia, the most exquisite refinements, the maddest splendour, — nothing now interests me. All things are indifferent, all things unbearable to me."

"It is easy to be seen," whispered Charmian, "that the queen has had no lover, and has had no one killed for a month."

Tired by her long tirade, Cleopatra again took up the cup placed by her side and raised it to her lips, put her head under her arm with a dovelike motion, and settled herself as well as she could to sleep. Charmian untied her sandals and gently tickled the soles of her feet with

the vane of a peacock's feather. Sleep soon cast its golden dust over the lovely eyes of Ptolemy's sister.

And now that Cleopatra is slumbering, let us ascend to the deck of the vessel and enjoy the wondrous sight of the setting sun.

A broad violet band, warmed by reddish tones in the west, fills the lower portion of the heavens. As it meets the azure zones, the violet tint melts into pale lilac and disappears in the blue with a rosy half-tint. On the side on which the sun, red as a buckler fallen from the forge of Vulcan, casts its crimson reflection, the tint turns to pale lemon-yellow and produces effects similar to those of a turquoise. The water, touched by an oblique ray, has the mat brilliancy of a mirror seen on the silvered side, or of a damascened blade. The sinuosities of the bank, the reeds, and the broken outlines of the shore stand out in strong black and bring out the more vividly the whitish reverberation. By the twilight luminousness one can perceive afar, like a grain of dust fallen upon quicksilver, a little brown dot that trembles in a network of luminous threads. Is it a teal diving, a tortoise drifting down stream, a crocodile raising the end of its squamous nose, in order to breathe the cooler air of evening, or the

belly of a hippopotamus turning on the water? Or is it a rock left uncovered by the sinking of the river? For old Hapimau, Father of Waters, is in great need of filling his empty urn with the rains of the solstice in the Mountains of the Moon.

It is nothing of the kind. By the pieces of Osiris, so happily put together again, it is a man who seems to walk or skate over the water. One can now see the skiff which upbears him, a little nutshell, a hollowed fish, three bands of bark put together, one forming the floor and two the sides, solidly fastened at each end with tarred cords. A man stands, one foot on each gunwale of the frail craft, which he manages with a single paddle that performs at the same time the office of rudder, and although the royal barge, impelled by fifty oars, flies swiftly along, the little black skiff is plainly gaining upon it. Cleopatra wished but now for a strange adventure, for something unexpected. That little slender craft with its mysterious ways strikes me as bearing with it, if not an adventure, at least an adventurer. Perchance it contains the hero of my tale.

In any case, he is a handsome young fellow of twenty, with hair so black that it shows blue against the golden skin, and of such perfect proportions that he

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rivals the speed of fifty oarsmen of the country of Kush, bare to the waist and rubbed with palm oil? What interest urges him to his deed? This is what I am obliged to know, in consequence of being a poet gifted with intuition, for whom all men, and even all women, —which is yet more difficult, — must have in the side the window called for by Momus.

It is not perhaps very easy to ascertain the thoughts of a young man of some two thousand years ago, from the land of Keme, who has followed the barge of Cleopatra, Queen and Goddess Evergetes, returning from the Hammisi of Hermonthis; nevertheless, I shall try.

Meïamoun, son of Mandouschopsch, was a young man of strange character. All that touches ordinary mortals made no impression upon him. He seemed to belong to a higher race. His glance had the brilliancy and fixity of the hawk, a serene majesty dwelt upon his brow as on a marble pedestal; a noble disdain curled his upper lip and swelled his nostrils like those of a spirited steed. Although he had almost the delicate grace of a young maid, and Dionysius, the effeminate god, had not a rounder and more polished breast, he concealed under this appearance of softness muscles of steel and Herculean strength, for he enjoyed the privi-

lege of certain natures of antiquity which united in themselves the beauty of woman and the strength of man. As for his complexion, I am constrained to confess that he was the colour of an orange, quite contrary to the rosy and white ideal of beauty which we indulge in; it did not, however, prevent his being a very charming young fellow, much sought after by all manner of red, yellow, copper-coloured, brown, and golden women, and even by more than one white-skinned Greek.

Do not, however, conclude from this that Meïamoun was a lady-killer. The ashes of old Priam, and icy Hippolytus himself were not more insensible and colder; a young neophyte in his white tunic, who is preparing to be initiated into the mysteries of Isis, does not lead a chaster life; a young girl who shivers in the glacial shadow of her mother has not as much timid purity.

The pleasures of Meïamoun were, nevertheless, of a curious kind for so shy a young man. He would start quietly in the morning with his little buckler of hippopotamus skin, his *harpe*, or curved sword, his triangular bow, and his serpent-skin quiver filled with barbed arrows. Then he would dash into the desert, and

send his slender-limbed steed, with its small head and flying mane, at full speed until he came across the track of a lioness. He greatly enjoyed taking the lion cubs from their watching mother. In everything he cared only for what was perilous or impossible. He loved to walk along impossible paths, to swim in turbulent waters, and he would have preferred to bathe in the Nile where it falls in cataracts. He had a love for the abyss. Such was Meïamoun, son of Mandouschopsch.

For some time past he had become more fond of solitude than ever. He would disappear for whole months within the ocean of sand, and reappear only at rare intervals. His anxious mother in vain bent from the top of her terrace and questioned the road with untiring eyes. After a long waiting a small cloud of dust would whirl on the horizon. Soon it would open and show Meïamoun, covered with dust, on his steed as thin as a she-wolf, with red, bloodshot eyes, quivering nostrils, and cicatrices on her flanks not due to spurs. Then, after having hung up in his room the skin of a hyena or a lion, he would start off again.

And yet no one could have been happier, had he chosen, than Meïamoun. He was loved by Nephte, the daughter of the priest Afomouthis, the loveliest girl

in the nome of Arsinoïtes. Any one but Meïamoun would have seen that Nephte had lovely eyes turned up at the corners with an indefinable expression of voluptuousness, a mouth on which flashed a rosy smile, white, clear teeth, exquisitely rounded arms, and feet more perfectly shaped than the jasper feet of the statue of Isis. Unquestionably, in all Egypt no one had a tinier hand or longer hair. Nephte's charms could have been surpassed only by the charms of Cleopatra. But who would think of falling in love with Cleopatra? Ixion, who loved Juno, clasped but a cloud in his arms, and is eternally turning his wheel in Hades.

Yet it was Cleopatra whom Meïamoun loved. At first he had endeavoured to overcome the mad passion; he had struggled bodily with it; but love is not to be choked as a lion is choked, and the most vigorous athletes are powerless against it. The arrow had remained in the wound, and he dragged it everywhere with him. The image of Cleopatra, radiant and splendid in her diadem with its golden spikes, standing alone in her imperial purple amid the kneeling people, shone upon him in his waking hours and in his sleep. Like the imprudent man who has gazed at the sun and who ever after sees a spot fluttering incessantly before him, so did Meïamoun

ever behold Cleopatra. Eagles may gaze at the sun without being dazzled, but what diamond eye could be fixed with impunity upon a beautiful woman, upon a beautiful queen?

His life was spent in wandering around the royal dwellings in order to breathe the same air as Cleopatra, to kiss on the sand — a happiness, alas! too rare — the half-effaced imprint of her foot. He attended the sacred festivals and celebrations, and tried to catch a glance of her eyes, to seize as she passed by one of the thousand aspects of her beauty. Sometimes he became ashamed of this mad existence, and then indulged in hunting with increased fury, endeavouring to tame by fatigue his hot blood and his passionate desires.

He had gone to the Panegyrics of Hermonthis, and in the vague hope of seeing the queen for a second when she landed at the Summer Palace, he had followed the barge on his skiff, without caring for the fierce beating of the sun, in a heat fit to bring out a sweat of lava upon the sphinxes lying breathless on their blazing pedestals. Then he understood that he had reached a supreme moment, that his fate was about to be decided, and that he could not die with his secret untold.

ONE OF CLEOPATRA'S NIGHTS

It is a strange situation for a man to be in — to love a queen; it is as if he loved a star. But the star will come every night to shine in its place in the heavens; it keeps a sort of mysterious tryst; it can be found; it can be seen, and glances do not offend it. But, oh, wretchedness! to be poor, unknown, obscure, to be at the very bottom of the ladder, and to feel one's heart full of love for a solemn, radiant, splendid creature, for a woman whose meanest maid would not even look at one! To fix one's glance unchangingly upon some one who sees not, who will never see; for whom one is but a wave in the crowd like other waves, and who passes one a hundred times without recognition! To have, if the occasion to speak occurs, no justification for one's mad audacity, neither a poet's talent nor great genius nor superhuman qualities, — nothing but love; and in exchange for beauty, nobility, power, all the splendours of one's dream, to bring in one's hands passion or youth only, not very rare things!

These thoughts overwhelmed Meïamoun, as he lay flat on the sand, his chin in his hands. He allowed himself to be swept away and borne along on the stream of passing reverie; he sketched a thousand plans, each more insensate than the others. He realised that what

he aimed at was impossible, but he had not the courage to frankly give up, and treacherous hope whispered lying promises in his ear.

" Hathor, mighty goddess," he murmured, " what have I done to you to make me so unhappy! Are you avenging yourself for my disdain of Nephte, the daughter of the priest Afoumouthis? Are you angry with me for having repelled Lamia, the Athenian hetaira, or Flora, the Roman courtesan? Is it my fault if my heart can feel only the beauty of Cleopatra, your sole rival? Why have you driven into my heart the poisoned barb of impossible love? What sacrifices and what offerings do you ask? Shall I build you a chapel of rose marble of Syêné, with columns and gilded capitals and a ceiling of one stone, and hieroglyphs cut by the best workmen of Memphis or Thebes? Answer me!"

But, like all gods and goddesses whom men call upon, Hathor answered nothing.

Meïamoun came to a desperate decision.

Cleopatra, on her part, was also invoking the goddess Hathor, asking of her a new pleasure, some yet unknown sensation. Languidly leaning upon her couch, she reflected that the number of senses is very

limited; that the most exquisite refinement is quickly followed by disgust, and that it is very difficult indeed for a queen to fill up her days. To try new poisons upon slaves, to have men fight with tigers, or gladiators fight with each other, to drink molten pearls, to devour a province, — all that was tasteless and commonplace. Charmian was reduced to expedients, and did not know what had come to her mistress.

Suddenly a hissing sound was heard, and an arrow quivered in the cedar wainscotting of the wall.

Cleopatra nearly fainted with terror. Charmian bent out of the window, but saw nothing save a fleck of foam on the river. A strip of paper was wound around the shaft of the arrow. Upon it were written these words in phonetic characters: "I love you."

IV

"I LOVE you!" repeated Cleopatra, twisting between her slender, white fingers the piece of papyrus rolled scutula fashion. "These are the words that I asked for. What intelligent soul, what concealed genius, has so well understood my desire?" And entirely roused from her languorous torpor, she sprang from her couch with the agility of a kitten that smells a mouse,

put her little, fairy feet into embroidered slippers, cast a byssus tunic on her shoulders, and hastened to the window out of which Charmian was still looking.

The night was clear and serene. The moon, which had already risen, cast great angles of shadow and light upon the architectural masses of the palace, which stood out strangely against a transparent, bluish background, and shimmered in silver upon the waters of the stream on which its rays lengthened out in a sparkling trail. A light breath of air, that might have been mistaken for the purring of the sleeping sphinxes, made the reeds quiver and the azure bells of lotus shiver. The cables of the boats moored by the banks of the Nile creaked softly, and the wave plained on the shore like a mateless dove. A vague perfume of vegetation, sweeter than that of the incense burned by the priests of Anubis, came up into the room. It was one of the enchanted nights of the East, more splendid than our loveliest days, for our sun is not the equal of such a moon.

"Do you not see yonder, about the centre of the stream, the head of a swimmer? See, he is now traversing the stretch of light, and is about to disappear in the shadow. Now we can no longer make him

out." And leaning upon Charmian's shoulder, she projected half of her beautiful body from the window in order to try to find the trace of the mysterious swimmer. But a wood of Nile acacias, of dôm palms and sealehs cast a shadow over the river at this place and protected the flight of the audacious man. If Meïamoun had had the wit to turn around, he would have caught sight of Cleopatra, the starry queen, whose glance was eagerly seeking him through the night, — him, the poor obscure Egyptian, the wretched lion-hunter.

" Charmian, send for Phrehipephbour, the chief of the rowers, and let two boats be sent without delay in pursuit of this man," said Cleopatra, whose curiosity was excited to the highest degree.

Phrehipephbour appeared. He was a man of the Nahasi race, with broad hands, muscular arms, wearing a red cap not unlike the Phrygian helmet, and close-fitting drawers striped diagonally white and blue. His torso, entirely bare, shone in the light of the lamp, black and polished like a jet globe. He received the queen's orders, and at once withdrew to carry them out.

Two long, narrow skiffs, so light that the least carelessness would have caused them to capsise, were soon

dashing across the Nile under the impulse of twenty vigorous oarsmen. But the quest was fruitless. After having explored the river in every direction and searched every tuft of reeds, Phrehipephbour returned to the palace without having done more than caused a sleeping heron to take flight and upset the digestion of a crocodile or two.

Cleopatra was so bitterly disappointed that she experienced a lively wish to doom Phrehipephbour to the grindstone or to the wild beasts. Fortunately Charmian interceded for the trembling wretch, who turned pale under his black skin. It was the first time in her life that one of Cleopatra's desires had not at once been fulfilled; she therefore experienced an uneasy surprise, a sort of first doubt as to her omnipotence.

She, Cleopatra, wife and sister of Ptolemy, proclaimed Goddess Evergetes, the Living Queen of the Lower and the Upper Regions, the Eye of Light, the Beloved of the Sun, as may be seen by the cartouches carved upon the temple walls, — she to meet with an obstacle, to have willed something which was not done, to have spoken and not been obeyed! She might just as well be the wife of some poor undertaker and melt bitumen in a kettle. It was monstrous, it was outrageous, and

indeed, if she had not been a very gentle and clement queen, she would have that wretch Phrehipephbour crucified.

Yet she had wished for an adventure, for something strange and unexpected, and her wish was gratified. Her kingdom was not as dead as she had thought; it was no stone statue's arm that shot the arrow; it was not from a mummy's heart that came the three words that had moved her, she who looked with a smile at her poisoned slaves, beating their heads and heels in agony upon her lovely pavements of mosaic and porphyry, she who applauded the tiger when it had torn open the side of the conquered gladiator!

She can have whatever she pleases: silver cars studded with emeralds, quadrigæ of griffins, tunics of purple thrice dyed, mirrors of polished steel set in precious stones so bright that she can see her beauty in them, gowns from the land of Serica, so fine, so tenuous that they could be passed through the ring on her little finger, pearls of perfect shape, cups by Lysippus or Myron, Indian parrots that speak like poets, — she can have everything she pleases, even if she call for the cestus of Venus or the pschent of Isis, but she will

not have to-night the man who shot the arrow that still quivers in the cedar-wood of her bed.

The slaves who will dress her to-morrow will not have a pleasant time. They had better be deft and light-handed, or the golden pins on the dressing-table may be thrust into the breast of the unskilful hair-dresser, and the rubber run the risk of being hanged from the ceiling by her feet.

"Who could have had the audacity to shoot that declaration fastened to an arrow? Is it the nomarch Ammon Ra, who believes himself more beautiful than the Apollo of the Greeks, or is it Cheopsira, the commander of Hermotybios, so proud of his battles in the country of Kush? Or may it not be rather young Sextus, the Roman debauchee, who rouges, lisps, and wears Persian sleeves?"

"O Queen, none of these. Although you are the loveliest woman in the world, these people flatter you and do not love you. Ammon Ra has an idol to which he will be always faithful, — himself; Cheopsira the warrior thinks only of telling his battles; as for Sextus, he is so taken up with compounding a new cosmetic that he has no thoughts for anything else. Besides, he has received from Laconia yellow tunics brocaded with

gold, and Asiatic children which entirely take up his attention. None of these handsome lords would risk his neck in so bold and perilous an enterprise, — they do not love you enough for that. But yesterday you said in your barge that dazzled eyes dare not gaze upon you, that men could only turn pale and fall at your feet in supplication, and that there was nothing left for you but to awaken in his gilded bier some old Pharaoh perfumed with bitumen. Now here is a young and ardent heart that loves you. What will you do with it?"

That night Cleopatra had much difficulty in going to sleep. She turned in her bed; she long called in vain for Morpheus the brother of Death. She repeated several times that she was the most unfortunate of queens, that everybody took pains to be contrary, that life was unbearable, — terrible grievances which did not touch Charmian very much, although she pretended to sympathise with them.

Let me leave Cleopatra in search of the sleep which avoids her, as she turns over in her mind the names of all the great at court, and let me return to Meïamoun. More skilful than Phrehipephbour, chief of the rowers, I shall manage to find him.

Terrified by his own boldness, Meïamoun had cast himself into the Nile and had swum across to the little grove of dôm palms before Phrehipephbour had launched the two boats in pursuit of him. When he had recovered his breath and thrown back behind his ears his long hair covered with the foam of the stream, he felt more comfortable and calmer. Cleopatra now had something that came from him; there was now a bond between them. Cleopatra thought of him, Meïamoun. It might have been an angry thought, but at least he had awakened in her some emotion, terror, anger, or pity; he had compelled her to be aware of his existence. It is true that he had forgotten to put his name upon the paper strip, but what would "Meïamoun, son of Mandouschopsch," have told the queen? A monarch or a slave were the same to her. A deity does not lower herself any more if she takes for her lover a man of the people than if she takes a patrician or a king. When one is placed so high, love alone is seen in a man.

The words that pressed upon his heart like the knee of a bronze statue had at last gone forth; they had traversed the air, had reached the queen, the apex of the triangle, the inaccessible summit. In her disillu-

sioned heart he had excited curiosity, which was a good deal.

Meïamoun had no idea that he had succeeded so well, but he was calmer, for he had sworn to himself by the mystic bari which takes souls to Amenti, by the sacred birds, Bennu and Gheughen, by Typhon, by Osiris, by all the terrors of Egyptian mythology, that he would be Cleopatra's lover, were it but a night, were it but an hour, even if it cost him his soul and body.

It would be useless to try to explain how this love had come about,—love for a woman whom he had only seen from afar and to whom he scarce dared lift his eyes, he who did not cast them down before the yellow orbs of lions; or how that little grain, fallen by chance in his soul, had grown so quickly and thrown out such deep roots. It is a mystery; as I have said, the abyss attracted him.

When he was quite sure that Phrehipephbour had returned with the oarsmen, he sprang a second time into the Nile and swam towards Cleopatra's palace, where a lamp shone through a purple curtain like a radiant star. Leander did not swim towards the Tower of Sestos more boldly and vigorously, yet Meïamoun was not awaited by a Hero, ready to pour

upon his head vials of perfumes in order to drive away the smell of the sea and the bitter kisses of the tempest. The best that could happen to him was a good lance-thrust or sword-cut; and, truth to tell, he was not much afraid of it.

He swam for some time along the palace wall, the marble base of which plunged into the river, and stopped before a submerged opening into which the water rushed with a whirl. He dived two or three times unsuccessfully. Finally he was luckier, found the passage, and disappeared.

The arcade was a vaulted canal which led the waters of the Nile to the baths of Cleopatra.

V

It was not until morning, at the time when dreams come back after their flight through the ivory gates, that Cleopatra slept. In her visions she saw all manner of lovers swimming or scaling walls to reach her, and — a remembrance of the night before — endless arrows bearing declarations of love. Her little feet, agitated by nervous tremulousness, beat upon the breast of Charmian lying across the bed to serve her as a pillow.

When she awoke, the brilliant sunshine was playing through the window curtain and lighting it up with innumerable points of light; it came familiarly to the bed and fluttered like a golden butterfly around her lovely shoulders, on which it dropped a kiss of light as it flashed. Happy sunbeam, which the gods would have envied!

Cleopatra, in a dying voice like a sick child's, called her maids to help her to rise. Two of her women lifted her in their arms and placed her carefully on the ground on a great tiger-skin, with claws of gold and eyes of carbuncles. Charmian wrapped her in a linen calasiris whiter than milk, bound her hair with a net of silver threads, and placed on her feet sandals of cork, on the soles of which, as a mark of contempt, had been drawn two grotesque figures representing two men of the Nahasi and Namou races, bound hand and foot, so that Cleopatra literally deserved the epithet, "She who treads on the Nations," which she bears in the royal cartouches.

It was the hour for the bath. Cleopatra went thither with her women. The baths were constructed in vast gardens filled with mimosas, carobs, aloes, lemon-trees, and Persian apple-trees, whose luxuriant cool-

ness contrasted delightfully with the aridity of the environs. Great terraces supported masses of verdure, and carried the flowers to heaven by giant staircases of rose granite. Vases of Pentelic marble bloomed like great lilies by the side of the steps, and the plants they contained seemed to be merely their pistils. Chimeras carved by the most skilful of Greek sculptors, and less repellent in appearance than the Egyptian sphinxes with their sour mien and their morose attitudes, lay idly on the sward diapered with flowers, like slender white greyhounds on the carpet of a drawing-room. They represented charming figures of women, straight-nosed, smooth-browed, with small mouths, arms delicately plump, round, clean breasts, with earrings, necklaces, and ornaments of exquisite fancifulness, and ending in fish-tails, like the woman of whom Horace speaks, or in birds' wings, or in the quarters of a lioness, or in volutes of foliage, according to the fancy of the artist and the exigencies of the architecture. A double row of these lovely monsters bordered the avenue leading from the palace to the bath hall.

At the end of the avenue lay a large basin with four porphyry steps leading through the transparent, sparkling water to the bottom covered with golden dust.

Statues of women, ending in a block like caryatids, poured from their breasts thin streams of scented water, which fell into the basin in silver spray and broke its clear surface with their glittering drops. Besides this purpose, the caryatids served the further one of bearing on their heads entablatures adorned with Nereids and Tritons in bas-relief, and provided with bronze rings to which were fastened the silken cords of the awning. Beyond the portico were seen cool, bluish greenery, umbrageous shades, a bit of the Vale of Tempe transported to Egypt. The famous gardens of Semiramis were as nothing by the side of these. I shall not mention the seven or eight other halls of different temperatures, with warm or cold vapour, boxes of perfumes, cosmetics, ointments, pumice-stones, hair gloves and all the refinements of the art of bathing carried by antiquity to so high a pitch of voluptuousness and refinement.

Cleopatra arrived leaning upon Charmian's shoulder. She had walked at least thirty steps by herself, a wondrous effort, a dreadful fatigue! A faint, rosy flush, showing under the transparent skin of her cheeks, brightened their warm pallor. Her temples, golden like amber, showed a network of blue veins; her

smooth brow, low like the brows of the women of antiquity, but perfectly rounded and shaped, was joined by an irreproachable line to a clean, straight nose, with rosy nostrils that palpitated at the least emotion like the nostrils of an amorous tigress; a small, round mouth, close to the nose, with disdainfully curled lip; but mad voluptuousness, incredible ardour of life, beamed in the red brilliancy, the humid lustre of her lower lip. Her eyelids were narrow, her eyebrows thin and almost straight. I shall not attempt to give an idea of her eyes, which were filled with a fire, a languor, a brilliant limpidity, that would have turned the dog's head of Anubis himself. Every one of her glances was a poem superior to those of Mimnermus or Homer. An imperial chin, full of strength and power, worthily rounded out her exquisite profile.

She remained standing on the first step of the basin in a proud, graceful attitude, leaning slightly backward, one foot uplifted, like a goddess about to leave her pedestal, her glance still fixed upon heaven; two superb folds fell from the tips of her breasts straight to the ground. Cleomenes, had he been her contemporary and able to see her, would have smashed his Venus for very annoyance.

Before entering the water, a new caprice led her to order Charmian to change her silver-net head-dress. She preferred a wreath of lotus flowers with reeds like a marine deity. Charmian obeyed. Her hair, unbound, fell in black masses upon her shoulders, and hung down her cheeks like ripe grapes. Then the linen tunic, held up by a single golden clasp, was undone, slipped down from her marble body, and fell like a white cloud at her feet, like the swan at the feet of Leda.

And where was Meïamoun? Ah, cruel fate! so many insensible things enjoy favours which would transport a lover with rapture. The wind toys with the perfumed hair or kisses lovely lips which it cannot appreciate; the water, indifferent to voluptuousness, envelops with a single caress the beautiful, adored body; the mirror reflects her many charming images; the cothurn or the sandal encloses a divinely small foot; — oh, how much delight wasted!

Cleopatra dipped into the water her golden foot, and descended a few steps. The shimmering water made her a belt and bracelets of silver, and rolled in pearls upon her breasts and shoulders like a broken necklace; her long hair, supported by the water, stretched behind her like a regal mantle. She was a queen even in her

bath. She came and went, plunged and brought up handfuls of golden sand which she laughingly threw at her women; at other times she hung over the balustrade of the basin, alternately hiding and revealing her charms, sometimes showing only her polished, lustrous back, sometimes exhibiting herself fully like Venus Anadyomene, and constantly varying the aspect of her beauty.

Suddenly she uttered a cry shriller than Diana's when surprised by Actæon. Through the foliage she had seen shining a burning glance, yellow and phosphorescent, like the eye of a crocodile or of a lion. It was Meïamoun, who, lying on the ground behind a tuft of foliage, more agitated than a fawn in a grain-field, was drinking in the dangerous joy of gazing upon the queen in her bath.

Although he was brave to rashness, Cleopatra's cry pierced his heart more coldly than a sword-thrust. A deathly sweat broke out on his body; his blood surged to his temples with a strident sound, and the iron grasp of anxiety clutched his throat and choked him. The eunuchs hastened up, lance in hand. Cleopatra pointed out the group of trees, where they found Meïamoun curled up in concealment.

Defence was impossible; he did not even attempt it, but allowed himself to be arrested. They were making ready to slay him with the cruel and stupid impassibility characteristic of eunuchs; but Cleopatra, who had had time to wrap herself in her calasiris, signed to them to stop and bring the prisoner before her.

Meïamoun fell at her feet, holding out towards her supplicating hands, as if she were the altar of the gods.

"Are you one of Rome's paid murderers? What were you doing within this sacred place whence men are banished?" said Cleopatra, with an imperious gesture of interrogation.

"May my soul be found light in the scales of Amente, and Tmei, daughter of the Sun and goddess of Truth, banish me, if I have ever entertained any evil thought towards you, O Queen," replied Meïamoun, still kneeling.

Sincerity and loyalty shone on his face so plainly that Cleopatra at once put away that thought, and fixed on the young Egyptian a less severe and less angry look. She thought him handsome.

"Then what motive brought you to a place where death alone awaited you?"

"I love you," murmured Meïamoun in a low but distinct voice; for his courage had come back, as in all extreme situations when at their worst.

"Oh!" said Cleopatra, bending towards him and seizing his arm with an abrupt, unexpected motion. "Then it was you who shot the arrow with the roll of papyrus! By Oms, the dog of the lower regions, you are a very bold wretch. Now I know you. I have long seen you wandering like a mournful shadow around the places I dwell in. You were at the procession of Isis, at the Panegyrics of Hermonthis; you followed my royal barge. Ah! you want a queen! Your ambition is not very modest. No doubt you expected to have your love requited, — of course I shall love you; why not?"

"O Queen," replied Meïamoun, with grave melancholy, "do not hurl sarcasms at me. I am mad, it is true; I have deserved death, that is true also. Be humane and have me slain."

"No, I shall indulge in the fancy of being clement to-day. I grant you your life."

"And what would you have me do with my life? I love you."

"Well, you shall be satisfied; you shall die!"

answered Cleopatra. "You dreamed a strange, an extravagant dream; your desires and your longings crossed the forbidden place. You thought you were Cæsar or Mark Antony, and you loved the Queen. In your hours of delirium you fancied, perchance, that circumstances which happen but once in a thousand years, might lead Cleopatra to love you one day! Well, what you believed impossible shall be; I shall turn your dream into reality; for once I shall enjoy satisfying a mad hope. I shall overwhelm you with splendour, with radiance and lightnings; I mean that your fortune shall be dazzling. You were at the bottom of the wheel, I shall put you at the top, abruptly, suddenly, without a transition. I take you from nothingness and make you the equal of the gods, — and then I shall plunge you back into nothingness. But do not call me cruel, do not implore my pity, do not weaken when the hour strikes. I am kind, I favour your folly. I have the right to have you slain at once, but you tell me you love me; you shall be slain to-morrow. Your life shall be given in exchange for one night. I am generous. I purchase it, though I might take it. But why are you at my feet? Rise and give me your hand to return to the palace."

VI

Our world is very small in comparison with the world of antiquity, our feasts very mean by the side of the terrific sumptuosity of Roman patricians and of Asiatic princes. Their ordinary meals would now pass for mad orgies, and the whole of a modern city could live for a week upon what was left by Lucullus after supping with a few intimate friends. We find it difficult to understand, with our miserable habits, these vast lives which realised all that imagination can invent in the way of boldness and strangeness and of most monstrously abnormal. Our palaces are stables in which Caligula would not have put his horses; the richest of our constitutional kings does not maintain the state of the humblest satrap or of a Roman proconsul. The brilliant skies that shone upon earth have died forever in the nothingness of uniformity. Above the black swarm of men rise no more those colossi whose Titan forms traversed the world with three strides like the heroes of Homer. There are no more towers of Lylacq, no more giant Babels raising to the heavens infinite spirals; no more immeasurable temples built of pieces of mountains; no more regal terraces which centuries and

nations could increase one course only at a time, and whence the prince, leaning on his elbow and sunk in thought, could look upon the figure of the world as upon an outspread map. No more labyrinthine cities, formed of inextricable masses of cyclopean edifices, with deep circumvallations, amphitheatres filled with roars night and day, reservoirs overflowing with sea-water and peopled with leviathans and whales, colossal staircases, superimposed terraces, towers whose summits were lost in clouds, giant palaces, aqueducts, vomitories and sombre necropolis. Alas! we have nothing left but plaster hives upon a checker-work of pavement.

It is amazing that men did not revolt against the confiscation of all riches and living forces for the benefit of a few privileged ones, and that such exorbitant fancies did not meet with obstacles upon their bloody road. The reason is that these wondrous lives were the realisation in the light of day of the dreams which each man dreamed at night; they were the incarnation of the common thought, and the nations saw themselves living, symbolised in those meteoric names which flame vividly in the night of ages. To-day, deprived of the dazzling spectacle of almighty will and the high con-

templation of the human soul, whose least desire manifested itself in incredible actions, in enormities of granite and bronze, the world is hopelessly and desperately weary; man is no longer represented in his imperial fancy.

The story which I write and the great name of Cleopatra which comes into it, have led to these reflections which sound ill in civilised ears; but the spectacle of the world of antiquity is so crushing, so discouraging to imaginations which believe they are extreme, and to minds which think they have attained the utmost limits of fairy magnificence, that I could not help embodying here my complaints and my regret at not having been the contemporary of Sardanapalus, Tiglath-Pileser, Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt, or even of Heliogabalus, Emperor of Rome and Priest of the Sun.

I have now to describe a supreme orgy, a feast by the side of which Balshazzar's would have paled,—one of Cleopatra's nights. How can I, with the French tongue, so chaste, so icily prudish, reproduce the frantic madness, the vast and mighty debauch, which unhesitatingly mingled the purple of blood and wine, and the furious impulses of unsatisfied voluptuousness seeking the impossible, with all that fire of the

senses which the long Christian fast has not yet deadened?

The promised night was to be splendid. All the joys possible to human existence had to be crowded into a few hours. Meïamoun's life was to be concentrated into a powerful elixir which he could drain at a draught. Cleopatra willed to dazzle her voluntary victim and to plunge him into a whirlwind of vertiginous voluptuousness, to intoxicate, to stun him with the wine of orgy, so that death, although expected, should come unseen and not understood.

Let me take my readers into the banquet hall.

Our existing architecture offers few points of comparison with the mighty buildings, the ruins of which resemble fallen mountains rather than edifices. It took all the exaggeration of antique life to animate and fill these prodigious palaces, the halls of which were so vast that they could have no ceiling other than the heavens, — a magnificent roof well worthy of such architecture.

The banqueting hall was of enormous and Babylonian proportions; the glance could not fathom its immeasurable depths. Monstrous columns, short, squat, sturdy enough to upbear the poles, raised their heavy,

swelling shafts upon pedestals covered with hieroglyphs, and supported on their massive capitals gigantic granite arches rising in courses like overset stairs. By each pillar a colossal basalt sphinx, crowned with the pschent, stretched out its head with its bearded chin, and with its oblique glance stared fixedly and mysteriously into the hall. On the second story, back of the first, the capitals of the columns, themselves more slender, were formed of four heads of women placed back to back, with fluted beards and the convoluted Egyptian headdress. Instead of sphinxes, bull-headed idols, impassible spectators of nocturnal and furious orgies, were seated on stone thrones like patient guests awaiting the beginning of the feast. The third story, of a different order, with bronze elephants projecting scented water through their trunks, crowned the edifice, and over all the sky spread like a blue abyss and the inquisitive stars leaned upon the frieze.

Prodigious staircases of porphyry, so polished that they reflected bodies like mirrors, ascended and descended on all sides and bound together these vast architectural masses.

I am merely giving a rapid sketch, to give an idea of the tremendous building with its superhuman pro-

portions. It would take the brush of Martin, the great painter of vanished enormities, and I have but a meagre pen-stroke instead of the apocalyptic depths of steel-plate engravings; but imagination must make up for what is wanting. Less fortunate than the painter or the musician, I can only present things one after another.

I have spoken of the architecture alone, leaving the guests aside, and even the banquet-hall I have merely indicated. Cleopatra and Meïamoun await us; they are now coming forward.

Meïamoun wore a linen tunic embroidered with stars, a mantle of purple and bands in his hair like an Eastern potentate. Cleopatra wore a sea-green robe open at the sides and held together by golden bees; on her fair arms two rows of great pearls; on her head a golden pointed crown. Instead of a smile on her lips, a shadow of preoccupation slightly darkened her lovely face, and her brows sometimes met with a feverish motion. What was troubling the great queen? As for Meïamoun, he had the radiant and luminous appearance of a visionary in ecstasy. Brilliant effluvia springing from his temples and his brow formed a golden nimbus around his head, as if he were one of the twelve great

gods of Olympus; a deep, serious joy shone in his eyes. He had embraced his chimera with the quick wings and it had not flown away; he was realising the aim of his life. If he were to live to the age of Nestor and Priam, if his veined temples were to be covered with white hair like that of the high priest of Ammon, he could feel nothing new, he could learn nothing more. He had obtained so much more than his wildest hopes that the world had nothing left to give him.

Cleopatra made him sit down by her side on a throne supported by golden griffins, and clapped her little hands together. Suddenly lines of fire, sparkling cords, outlined every projection of the architecture; the eyes of the sphinxes cast phosphorescent lightnings; a burning breath poured from the mouth of the idols; the elephants, instead of scented water, projected glowing streams; bronze arms issued from the walls holding lighted torches in their hands; in the carved calyx of the lotus flowers suddenly flamed dazzling aigrettes; great bluish flames rose and fell on the brazen tripods; giant chandeliers shed their light in a radiant vapour; everything shone and beamed. The colours of the prism broke and crossed in the air; the facets of the

cups, the angles of the marbles and the jaspers, the chasing of the vases, — everything was studded with sparks, with gleams, or with flashes. Light poured in torrents, and coursed from step to step like cascades down the porphyry stairs. It resembled the reflection of a conflagration in a river. If the Queen of Sheba had ascended those stairs, she would have lifted up her gown, thinking she was walking in water, as on the ice floor of Solomon.

Through this brilliant mist the monstrous figures of the colossi, the animals, the hieroglyphs seemed to be animated and to live a fictitious life. The black granite rams sneered ironically and clashed their golden horns, the idols breathed heavily through their palpitating nostrils.

The orgy was at its highest point. Dishes of flamingoes' tongues and livers of scarrus, murreys fed on human flesh and prepared with garum, peacocks' brains, wild boars full of living birds, and all the marvels of a feast of antiquity multiplied a hundred-fold, were heaped up on the three sides of the gigantic triclinium. The wines of Crete, Massica, and Falerno foamed in the golden urns crowned with roses, which were filled by Asiatic pages on whose lovely hair the

guests wiped their hands. Musicians playing on the sistra, the tympanon, on the sackbut and harps with twenty-one chords filled the upper bays and cast their harmonious melodies into the tempest of sound which spread over the feast. The thunder itself could not have been heard.

Meïamoun, leaning on Cleopatra's shoulder, felt his senses deserting him; the banquet hall was whirling around him like a vast architectural nightmare; through the dazzling light he beheld endless perspectives and colonnades; new zones of porticos rose above the real ones and plunged into the heavens to heights Babel never reached. Had he not felt Cleopatra's soft, cool hand in his own, he would have believed himself transported into the world of enchantment by a Thessalian wizard or a Persian mage.

Towards the end of the meal humpbacked dwarfs and tiny Moors performed grotesque dances and combats; then entered Egyptian and Greek maidens, representing the white and the black hours, dancing to an Ionian mode a voluptuous dance of inimitable perfection.

Cleopatra herself rose from her throne, cast off her royal mantle, changed her starry diadem for a wreath

of flowers, slipped golden crotala on her alabaster hands, and began to dance before Meïamoun, lost in ecstasy. Her fair arms, curved like the handles of a marble vase, cast above her head streams of sparkling notes, and her crotala clattered with ever-increasing volubility. Standing upon the golden tips of her little feet, she advanced rapidly and touched Meïamoun's brow with a kiss; then she resumed her dance and fluttered around him, sometimes throwing herself back, her head down, her eyes half-closed, her arms limp, her hair undone and hanging, like a Bacchante of Mænalus inspired by her god; sometimes quick, lively, laughing, butterfly-like, indefatigable, and more capricious in her meanderings than a bee in pursuit of honey. She expressed everything, — heart's love, sensual voluptuousness, ardent passion, inexhaustible, fresh youth, the promise of future happiness.

The modest stars had ceased to look. Their chaste, golden eyes could not have borne such a sight; even the sky was effaced, and a dim, fiery vapour covered the hall.

Cleopatra returned and sat down by Meïamoun. The night was waning; the last of the dark hours was about to fly; a bluish light penetrated with uncertain

motion into this tumult of red light like a moonbeam falling within a furnace. The upper arcades became bluer; the day was dawning.

Meïamoun took the horn vase held out to him by an Ethiopian slave of sinister countenance. The vase contained a poison so violent that it would have burst any other vessel.

Casting his life to his mistress in one last glance, he bore to his lips the fatal cup in which the poisoned drink was boiling and hissing. Cleopatra turned pale and placed her hand on Meïamoun's arm to restrain him. His courage touched her; she was just about to say, "Live on to love me; I will it," when the sound of clarions was heard. Four heralds rode into the banquet hall. They were officers of Mark Antony, preceding their master by a few steps. Silently she let go of Meïamoun's arm. A sunbeam played upon her brow as if to replace her absent diadem.

"You see yourself the time has come. It is day, the hour when fair dreams vanish," said Meïamoun. Then at one draught he emptied the fatal cup and fell as if struck by lightning. Cleopatra bowed her head, and within her cup a burning tear, the only one she ever shed, joined the melted pearl.

ONE OF CLEOPATRA'S NIGHTS

"By Hercules, my lovely queen, though I travelled fast, I see I have come too late," said Mark Antony, as he entered the banquet hall. "Supper is over—but what is this body lying on the flags?"

"Oh, nothing," said Cleopatra, smiling. "A poison I was trying; to use if Augustus should take me prisoner. Will you not, my dear lord, sit down beside me and watch these Greek buffoons dance?"

King Candaules

KING CANDAULES

I

FIVE hundred years after the War of Troy and seven hundred and fifteen years before the Christian era, there was a great festival in Sardis: King Candaules was being married. The people felt that sort of joyous anxiety and aimless emotion inspired in masses by any event, although it affects them in no wise, and occurs in higher spheres which they will never approach.

Since Phœbus Apollo, standing on his quadriga, had gilded with his beams the summit of Mount Tmolus, fertile in saffron, the worthy inhabitants of Sardis had been coming and going, ascending and descending the marble stairs which connect the city with the Pactolus, the rich river which Midas, by bathing in it, filled with golden sands. So important and solemn did these worthy citizens look that it would have been thought each of them was himself being married.

Groups formed on the Agora, on the steps of the temples, under the porticos. At every street corner

were met women dragging by the hand poor children whose short steps ill accorded with the maternal impatience and curiosity. The maidens hastened to the fountains, their jars poised on their heads or upheld by their white arms as by natural handles, to supply the household with water in order to be free when the marriage procession should pass. The washerwomen were hastily folding up the scarcely dried tunics and chlamyds, and piled them on chariots drawn by mules. Slaves turned the grindstones without the overseer having to tickle their bare shoulders, marked with cicatrices, with his whip. Sardis was hastening to be done with the daily cares which cannot be dispensed with on account of any festival.

The road to be traversed by the procession had been strewn with fine yellow sand. At intervals there arose to heaven odorous vapours of cinnamon and nard from brazen tripods. These were the only vapours that marred the purity of the blue sky; the clouds of a wedding day should be those only produced by the burning of perfumes. Branches of myrtles and of rose laurel strewed the ground, and on the walls of the palaces were displayed, suspended from bronze rings, tapestries on which the needles of industrious captives, mingling

wool, silver, and gold, had represented various scenes of the history of the gods and heroes: Ixion embracing the cloud; Diana surprised in the bath by Actæon; the shepherd Paris, judge at the competition of beauty which took place on Mount Ida between Hera with the snowy arms, Athene with the sea-green eyes, and Aphrodite wearing the magical cestus; the old men of Troy rising as Helen passed through the Scæan gates, a subject drawn from the poem of the blind man of Meles. Many had exposed by preference scenes drawn from the life of Hercules the Theban, a delicate flattery intended for Candaules, who was a Heraclid, the descendant of Hercules through Alcæus. Others had been satisfied to adorn the threshold of their dwellings with garlands and wreaths as a mark of rejoicing.

Among the groups stationed from the entrance of the royal palace to the city gate through which the young queen was to enter, the conversation turned naturally on the beauty of the bride, the renown of which filled Asia, and on the character of the husband, who, without being quite eccentric, seemed nevertheless difficult to understand from the ordinary point of view.

KING CANDAULES

Nyssia, the daughter of the satrap Megabasus, was endowed with marvellous beauty of features and perfection of form; at least this is what the slaves who served her and the friends who accompanied her to the bath reported, for no man could boast of knowing aught more of Nyssia than the colour of her veil and the elegant folds which in spite of herself she imparted to the soft stuffs that draped her statue-like form.

Barbarians do not share the ideas of the Greeks on modesty. While the young men of Achaia do not scruple to exhibit in the sunshine of the *stadium* their torsos rubbed with oil, and the Spartan virgins dance unveiled before the altar of Diana, the youth of Persepolis, Ecbatana, and Bactra, prizing more highly modesty of the body than modesty of the soul, consider impure and reprehensible the liberties which Greek manners accord to the pleasure of the eye, and consider a woman shameless who allows men to see more than the tip of her toe, scarcely brushing aside, as she walks, the discreet folds of her long tunic.

In spite of this mystery, or rather, because of this mystery, Nyssia's reputation had rapidly spread throughout Lydia, and had become so great that it had reached even Candaules, although kings are usually the least

well-informed people in their realm, living, as they do, like the gods, in a sort of cloud which conceals from them the knowledge of terrestrial things.

The Eupatrids of Sardis, who had hoped that the young King might choose a wife from their family, the hetairæ of Athens, Samos, Miletus, and Cyprus, the lovely slaves who had come from the banks of the Indus, the fair-haired girls brought at great expense from the country of Cimmerian fogs, took great care never to utter before Candaules a single word which in any way might refer to Nyssia ; the bravest as regarded beauty hesitated at the thought of a rivalry which they felt must be unequal.

And yet no one in Sardis, or even in Lydia, had seen this formidable adversary ; no one, save a single being, who since that time had kept his lips as closed on the subject as if Harpocrates, the God of Silence, had sealed them with his finger. This was Gyges, the captain of the guards of Candaules. One day Gyges, full of vague projects and emotions, was wandering on the hills of Bactra, whither his master had sent him on an important secret errand. He was thinking of the intoxication of almighty power, of the pleasure of trampling the purple with golden sandals, of placing

the diadem on the head of the loveliest. These thoughts made his blood surge in his veins, and as if following the flight of his dreams, he spurred with excited heel the foam-flecked flanks of his Numidian steed.

The weather, calm at first, had become as stormy as the warrior's soul, and Boreas, his hair stiff with the ice of Thrace, his cheeks swollen, his arms crossed on his chest, was driving on the rain clouds with great blows of his wings.

A band of young girls gathering flowers in the country, terrified by the storm, were hastening back to the city, bearing their perfumed harvest in the folds of their tunics. Seeing a stranger arriving on horseback, they had, according to the custom of the Bactrians, thrown their mantles over their faces; but at the moment when Gyges passed by one, whose proud bearing and richer vestments seemed to mark her as the mistress of the company, a sudden gust of wind had blown aside her veil, and whirling it in the air like a feather, had carried it away so far that it was impossible to recover it. It was Nyssia, the daughter of Megabasus, who thus stood with uncovered face before Gyges, the captain of the guards of King Candaules. Was it indeed

merely the breath of Boreas which had caused this accident, or did Eros, who takes pleasure in troubling souls, amuse himself in cutting the band which held the protecting tissue? However it may be, Gyges remained motionless at the aspect of this Medusa of beauty, and the folds of Nyssia's robe had long disappeared under the city gate before Gyges had thought of resuming his way. Although nothing justified his supposition, he felt that he had just seen the satrap's daughter, and the meeting, which had almost the character of an apparition, agreed so well with the thoughts that filled his mind at that moment, that he could not help believing it an act of Fate, an event planned by the gods. That was the brow on which he would have wished to place a diadem, — what other more worthy of it? But what probability was there that Gyges would ever have a throne to share?

He had not attempted to follow up this adventure and to make certain that it was really the daughter of Megabasus whose mysterious face Chance, the great magician, had revealed to him. Nyssia had vanished so swiftly that it would have been impossible for him to find her again. But, besides, he had been dazzled, fascinated, thunderstruck, rather than

charmed by her marvellous appearance, by her wondrous beauty.

Yet her image, scarce seen for a moment, was engraved on his heart as deeply as the features which sculptors draw on ivory with a red-hot graver. In vain he had tried his best to efface it, for his love for Nyssia filled him with secret terror. Perfection carried to such a point is always troubling; women so similar to deities must be fatal to weak mortals; they are created for celestial amours, and men, even the most courageous, venture but tremblingly into such loves. So no hope had sprung up in the soul of Gyges, borne down and discouraged beforehand by the feeling of impossibility. Ere he could venture to address Nyssia, he felt as if he must strip the sky of its stars, rob Phœbus of his radiant crown; forgetting that women give themselves only to those who do not deserve them, and that the best way to be loved by them is to act as if one sought their hatred.

Since that day, the roses of joy no longer bloomed upon his cheeks. By day he was sad, gloomy, and seemed to walk alone in his dream like a mortal who has beheld a goddess; by night he was tormented by dreams that showed him Nyssia seated by his side on

purple cushions, between the golden griffins of the royal throne.

So Gyges, the only one who could have spoken of Nyssia from actual experience, having said nothing, the people of Sardis were reduced to conjectures, and it must be acknowledged that these were most strange and fabulous.

Nyssia's beauty, thanks to the veils which concealed it, had become a sort of myth, of canvas, of poem, which each embroidered according to his taste.

"If what is stated is true," lisped a young debauchee of Athens, his hand resting on the shoulder of an Asiatic child, "neither Plangon nor Archenassa nor Thaïs can be compared with this barbaric marvel; and yet I find it difficult to believe that she is the equal of Theano of Colophon, whom I purchased for one night at the price of the gold she could carry off when plunging her white arms up to her shoulders in my cedar coffer."

"By the side of her," added a Eupatrid, who pretended to be better informed about everything, "by the side of her the daughter of Cœlus and the Sea would look like a Theban servant."

"You are speaking blasphemy, and although Aphro-

dite is a good and kind goddess, take care lest you draw down her wrath upon you."

"By Hercules! — which is an oath of some weight in a city governed by his descendants, — I do not take back a single word."

"You have seen her, then?"

"No; but I have a slave who formerly belonged to Nyssia, and who has told me many things about her."

"Is it true," asked in a childish way a doubtful-looking woman, whose pale-rose tunic, rouged cheeks, and hair shining with essences announced hopeless pretensions to a youthfulness long since vanished, "is it true that Nyssia has two pupils in each eye? It must be very ugly, I should think, and I cannot understand how Candaules should fall in love with such a monstrosity, while in Sardis and Lydia there are numbers of women whose eyes are irreproachable."

Saying these words, with all sorts of airs and affectations, Lamia cast a significant glance at a little metal mirror which she drew from her bosom, and which enabled her to restore to their place the curls deranged by the importunate breeze.

"As regards the double pupil, that strikes me as an old-wives' tale," said the well-informed Eupatrid;

"but it is certain that Nyssia's glance is so piercing that she can see through walls. In comparison with her, lynxes are short-sighted."

"How can a serious man talk such nonsense?" interrupted a citizen, whose bald head and long white beard which he stroked while speaking gave him an air of philosophical importance and sagacity. "The truth is that the daughter of Megabasus does not naturally have better sight than you or I, only the Egyptian priest Thoutmosis, who knows so many wondrous secrets, has bestowed on her the mysterious stone found in dragons' heads, which, as is well known, enables those who possess it to see through the most opaque shadows and bodies. Nyssia always wears that stone in her belt or her bracelet, — that is the explanation of her remarkable sight."

The citizen's explanation seemed more natural to the members of the group whose conversation I am attempting to relate, and the views of Lamia and the patrician were rejected as improbable.

"In any case," resumed Theano's lover, "we shall be able to judge for ourselves, for it seems to me that I hear the clarions sounding afar, and without having Nyssia's sight I can see yonder the heralds

advancing with palms in their hands announcing the arrival of the wedding procession and forcing the crowd back."

At this news, which rapidly spread, strong men used their elbows, to get to the front row; agile youths, embracing the shafts of pillars, endeavoured to climb to the capitals and sit there; others, at the cost of skinning their knees against the bark, managed to perch themselves comfortably enough in the elbows of the branches of trees; women placed their little children on one shoulder, advising them to cling closely to their necks; those who were fortunate enough to live in the street through which Candaules and Nyssia were to pass, looked from their roofs, or, raising themselves on their elbows, left for a moment the pillows which supported them.

A murmur of satisfaction and relief ran through the crowd, which had been waiting for many hours already, and the beams of the noonday sun were beginning to make themselves felt.

Warriors heavily armed with cuirasses of buffalo-skin covered with plates of metal, helmets adorned with aigrettes of horse-hair dyed red, knemids lined with tin, baldrics studded with nails, blazoned bucklers,

and brazen swords, marched behind a row of trumpeters who were blowing hard in their long tubes that shone in the sunshine. The steeds of these warriors, as white as the feet of Thetis, might have served, by the nobility of their gait and their thorough breeding, as models for those which Phidias carved later on the metope of the Parthenon.

At the head of this troop rode Gyges, well named, for in Lydian "Gyges" means "handsome." His features, almost absolutely regular, seemed cut out of marble, so pale was he, for he had just recognised in Nyssia, although she was covered with the veil of brides, the woman whose face the treason of the wind had exposed to his looks by the walls of Bactra.

"Handsome Gyges seems very sad," said the maidens. "What proud beauty has disdained his love? Or has some one whom he has neglected had a spell cast on him by a Thessalian witch. Can the magic ring, which he found, it is said, within the depths of a forest, within the flanks of a bronze horse, have lost its virtue and ceased to render its master invisible? Has it suddenly betrayed him to the astonished glance of some worthy husband who thought himself alone in his conjugal chamber?"

" Perhaps he has lost his talents and his drachmas at the game of Palamedes, or else he is annoyed at not having won the prize at the Olympic Games. He reckoned greatly upon his horse Hyperion."

None of these conjectures was correct. People never do guess the truth.

Next to the battalion commanded by Gyges came young boys crowned with myrtles, who playing upon ivory lyres with a bow, accompanied an epithalamium in the Lydian mode. They wore rose-coloured tunics embroidered with silver threads, and their hair hung down on their shoulders in thick curls. They preceded the bearers of presents, robust slaves whose half-nude bodies exhibited muscles which the most vigorous athlete might have envied.

On litters borne by two, four, or more men, according to the weight of the objects, were placed enormous brazen cups carved by the most famous artists; vases of gold and silver, their sides adorned with *bassi-relievi*, their graceful handles covered with chimeras, foliage, and nude women; magnificent ewers for the washing of the feet of illustrious guests; flagons encrusted with precious stones and holding the rarest of perfumes, — Arabian myrrh, Indian cinnamon, Persian nard, Smyrna

essence of roses; perfume burners, the covers pierced with holes; coffers of cedar and ivory of marvellous workmanship, opening by secret methods unknown to any but the inventor and containing bracelets of gold of Ophir, necklaces of the finest orient pearls, clasps studded with rubies and carbuncles; toilet cases containing yellow sponges, curling-irons, sea-wolves' teeth for polishing the nails, the green rouge of Egypt, which turns the loveliest red on touching the skin, powders to darken the eyebrows and eyelids, — in a word, all that feminine coquetry can invent in the way of refinement. On other litters were borne purple robes of the finest wool, and of every shade, from the carnation of the rose to the deep red of the juice of the grape; calasiris of Canopean linen which are thrown white into the dyers' vats, and which, thanks to the different mordants with which they are impregnated, emerge diapered with the most brilliant colours; tunics brought from the fabulous country of Serica, at the very extremity of the world, made with thread spun by a worm that lives on leaves, and so fine that they might have been drawn through a ring.

Ethiopians, shining like jet, their heads bound with cords, so that the veins of their brows should not burst

under the efforts they made to support their burden, carried in great pomp a colossal statue of Hercules, the ancestor of Candaules, made of gold and ivory, with the club, the Nemæan lion's skin, the three golden apples of the gardens of the Hesperides, and all the consecrated attributes.

The statues of the celestial Venus and of Venus Genetrix, carved by the best pupils of the school of Sicyon in that marble of Paros whose brilliant transparency seems made on purpose to represent the ever youthful flesh of the immortal goddesses, followed the effigy of Hercules, whose powerful contours and muscular forms brought out still more strongly the harmony and elegance of their proportions.

A painting by Bularchus, bought for its weight in gold by Candaules, painted upon a panel of the wood of the female larch and representing the defeat of the Magnetes, excited general admiration by the perfection of the drawing, the accuracy of the attitudes, and the harmony of the colour, although the artist had made use of the four primitive colours only, — white, Attic ochre, red earth of Sinope, and atrament. The young King loved painting and sculpture rather more than beseems a monarch, and he often spent a year's in-

come from one of his cities in the purchase of a costly painting.

Camels and dromedaries with magnificent housings and trappings, bestridden by musicians playing on cymbals and tympanons, bore the golden pins, the cords and stuffs of the tent intended for the young queen when she went travelling or hunting.

On any other occasion these splendours would have delighted the people of Sardis, but their curiosity had another object, and this portion of the procession was watched with some impatience. The maidens, waving burning torches and scattering handfuls of crocus flowers, were not even looked at. The thought of beholding Nyssia filled every mind.

At last Candaules appeared riding on a car drawn by four horses, — handsome and spirited as those of the Sun, covering their golden bits with white foam, shaking their purple tressed manes, and held in with difficulty by the driver, who stood by the prince and leaned back to secure a greater purchase.

Candaules was a vigorous young man, who fully justified his Herculean descent. His head was joined to his shoulders by a bull neck; his black, lustrous hair curled in short, rebellious curls, and in places cov-

ered the band of the royal diadem. His small, straight ears were red; his brow was broad and full, though somewhat low like the brows of the people of antiquity; his glance, full of softness and melancholy; his oval cheeks, his chin with its gentle, easy curve, his mouth with half-opened lips, his athletic arm ending in a woman's hand, marked a poetic rather than a warlike nature; and indeed, though he was brave and skilful in every bodily exercise, breaking in a horse as cleverly as one of the Lapithæ, swimming across the rivers which flow from the mountains swollen by the melting snows, capable of bending the bow of Odysseus and of bearing the buckler of Achilles, he did not seem to be preoccupied by conquest; and war, so attractive to young sovereigns, had but mediocre attractions for him. He was satisfied with repelling the attacks of ambitious neighbours, without attempting to extend his possessions. He preferred to build palaces and to advise his architects, to collect statues and paintings by old and new masters. He possessed works by Telephanes of Sicyon, Cleanthes and Ardices of Corinth, Hygiemon, Dinias, Charmadas, Eumarus, and Cimon, — some mere drawings, others coloured or in monochrome. It was even said that Candaules had, for-

getful of princely decency, not disdained to handle with his royal hands the sculptor's chisel and the sponge of the painter of encaustics.

But why do we dwell on Candaules? The reader, no doubt, like the people of Sardis, cares only for Nyssia.

The daughter of Megabasus was seated upon an elephant with wrinkled skin and huge ears like standards, that advanced with heavy but swift step like a vessel amid waves. Its tusks and trunk were bound with silver rings, strings of huge pearls wound around its pillar-like legs. On its back, covered by a magnificent Persian carpet with variegated designs, rose a sort of howdah covered with chased gold and studded with onyx, sardonyx, chrysolite, lapis-lazuli, and opals. In this howdah was seated the young queen, so covered with gems that she dazzled the eyes. A mitre shaped like a helmet on which pearls formed designs and letters after the Oriental fashion, covered her head; her ears, pierced in the lobes and on the edges, were laden with ornaments in the shape of cups, crescents, and balls; necklaces of open-work gold and silver balls hung in triple rows around her neck and fell upon her bosom with metallic rustlings; emerald serpents with eyes of

rubies and topazes wound around her arms, biting their own tails. These bracelets were connected by chains of precious stones, and their weight was so great that two maids, kneeling on either side of Nyssia, supported her elbows. She wore a dress embroidered by the workmen of Tyre with brilliant patterns of gold leaves and diamond fruits, and over it a short Persepolis tunic, which came down almost to the knee, with sleeves slit open and held together by sapphire clasps. Around her waist she had a sash made of narrow stuff marked with stripes and designs that formed symmetrical patterns as they were brought together by the arrangement of the folds, which Indian girls alone know how to manage. Her drawers of byssus — which the Phœnicians call syndon — were fastened above the ankles by anklets adorned with balls of silver and gold, and completed a costume of barbaric richness absolutely opposed to Greek taste. But alas! a saffron-coloured flammeum closely masked the face of Nyssia, who appeared troubled, although she was veiled, at the sight of so many glances fixed upon her, and who often signed to the slaves placed behind her to lower the parasol of ostrich-feathers so that she might be the better concealed from the eager crowd.

In vain had Candaules begged; he had been unable to induce her to throw off her veil even on this solemn occasion. The young barbarian had refused to pay to her people the welcome of beauty. Great was the disappointment. Lamia maintained that Nyssia dared not unveil for fear of showing her double eyes; the young debauchee was convinced that Theano of Colophon was more beautiful than the Queen of Sardis; and Gyges sighed when he saw Nyssia, after her elephant had knelt down, descend upon the bowed heads and the arms of the slaves, as down a living staircase, to the threshold of the royal dwelling, in which the elegance of Greek architecture was mingled with the fancifulness and the enormities of Asiatic taste.

II

More fortunate than the Sardians, who, after a day's waiting, were obliged to return home reduced as before to mere conjectures, I, as a poet, have a right to draw aside the saffron-coloured flammeum which veiled the young bride.

Nyssia was really more beautiful than she was said to be: it seemed as though nature had intended, in

creating her, to use her power to the utmost and to be pardoned all her gropings and all her failures. It seemed as though, moved by a feeling of jealousy of the future marvels of the Greek sculptors, she also had tried to model a statue and to show that she was still sovereign mistress in matters of plastics.

The grain of the snow, the micaceous brilliancy of Parian marble, the shining pulp of the flowers of the balsam, convey but an imperfect notion of the ideal substance of which Nyssia was formed. Her fine, delicate flesh was interpenetrated by the light, and the contours were modelled transparently in suave, harmonious, rhythmic lines. In her different aspects she was sunny or rosy, like the odoriferous body of a goddess, and seemed to radiate light and life. The world of perfections contained in the noble oval of her chaste face no man can ever describe, no painter reproduce with his brush, no sculptor with his chisel, no poet with his style, even were they Praxiteles, Apelles, or Mimnermus. On her smooth brow, shaded by waves of ruddy hair, like molten electron, and powdered with golden filings according to the Babylonian fashion, reigned, as on a jasper throne, the unchangeable serenity of perfect beauty.

As for her eyes, if they did not fully bear out what popular credulity believed of them, they were at least wondrously strange. Brown eyebrows, the extremities of which were gracefully fined away like the ends of Cupid's bow, and joined by a line of hair after the Asiatic fashion, long fringes of silky, shadowy lashes, contrasted strangely with two sapphire stars playing on a sky of bluish silver which formed the eyeballs. The eyeballs, the pupil of which was darker than ink, showed singular variations of tint in the iris. They passed from sapphire to turquoise, from turquoise to aquamarine, from aquamarine to yellow amber, and sometimes like a limpid lake the bottom of which is strewn with gems, allowed to be seen at unfathomable depths sands of gold and diamonds on which green filaments wriggled and twisted like emerald serpents. In these eyes with phosphorescent flashes or beams of dead suns, the splendour of vanished worlds, the glories of eclipsed Olympus, seemed to have concentrated their reflections. On looking at them eternity was recalled, and one was seized with vertigo as when bending over the edge of infinity.

The expression of these extraordinary eyes was no less changeable than their colour. Sometimes the eye-

lids, half opening like the gates of the celestial dwellings, called one into elysiums of light, ineffable azure and felicity, promising the realisation of all one's dreams of happiness twenty-fold and a hundred-fold, as though they had read the secret thoughts of one's soul. At other times, as impenetrable as the bucklers composed of seven superimposed plates of the hardest metals, the glance fell against them weak and like blunted arrows. With a mere bending of the brow, with one turn of the eye more tremendous than Jove's lightning, they hurled one from the top of the most ambitious ascents into such deep nothingness that it was impossible to rise again. Typhon himself, who turns over under Ætna, could not have raised the mountains of disdain with which they overwhelmed one. They made one feel that even if a man possessed, in the course of a life of a thousand Olympiads, the beauty of the fair son of Leto, the genius of Orpheus, the boundless power of the Assyrian kings, the treasures of the Cabiri, the Telchines and the Dactyli, gods of subterranean riches, it would be hopeless to induce them to assume a softer expression. At other times they were filled with such eloquent, emotional, and persuasive languor, with such penetrating effluvia and radiations, that the ice of Nestor

and Priam would have melted at their aspect as the waxen wings of Icarus on his approach to the burning zones. For a single one of these glances, a man would have imbrued his hands in the blood of his host, scattered to the four winds of heaven his father's ashes, overthrown the sacred images of the gods, and stolen fire from heaven like Prometheus, the sublime thief.

Yet their most common expression, I must say, was one of inflexible chastity, of sublime coldness, of ignorance of all possibilities of human passion, by the side of which the moon-like eyes of Phœbe and the sea-green eyes of Athene would have appeared more lascivious and alluring than those of a Babylonian maiden sacrificing to the goddess Mylitta within the roped-in space of the court of Succoth-Benoth. Their unconquerable virginity seemed to defy love.

Nyssia's cheek, which no human glance had profaned save that of Gyges on the day when her veil flew away, had a bloom of youth, a tender pallor, a delicacy of grain and down, of which not the faintest idea can be formed from the faces of our women, which are always exposed to the air and sunshine. Maidenly modesty flushed them with a rose such as might be produced by a drop of red essence within a cupful of milk; and

when no emotion coloured them, they had silvery reflections, warm gleams, like alabaster lighted from within. The light was her lovely soul seen through her transparent flesh.

A bee would have mistaken her mouth for a flower, so perfect was its shape, the corners so exquisitely arched, the redness so living and rich; the gods themselves would have come down from their Olympic dwellings to touch it with their lips moist with immortality, had not the jealousy of the goddesses prevented them. Happy indeed the air that breathed through that purple and those pearls, that dilated the lovely nostrils so exquisitely formed and shaded with rosy tints like the interior of the shells cast by the sea on the shores of Cyprus at the feet of Venus Anadyomene! But that is just the way many delights are granted to things unable to understand them. What lover does not long to be the tunic worn by his beloved, or the water in which she bathes?

Such was Nyssia, if I may apply the words to so vague a description of her beauty. If our dull Northern idioms had the warm liberty, the burning enthusiasm of Sir-Hasirim, perhaps by means of comparisons, by calling up to the reader's mind recollections of flowers,

perfumes, music, and sunshine, by evoking by the magic of words all that creation contains of graceful and charming ideas, I might have managed to give some notion of Nyssia's appearance. But Solomon alone may compare the nose of a beautiful woman to the tower of Lebanon that looks towards Damascus. And yet what more important in the world than a beautiful woman's nose? If Helen, the fair Tyndaris, had been flat-nosed, would the war of Troy ever have taken place, and if Sem Rami had not had a perfectly regular profile, would she ever have seduced the old monarch of Nin-Nevet, and bound on her brow the pearl mitre, mark of supreme power?

Although Candaules had had brought to his palaces the loveliest slaves of Sour, Askelon, Sakkes, Razaf, the most famous courtesans of Ephesus, Pergamos, Smyrna, and Cyprus, he was completely fascinated by Nyssia's charms. He had not even suspected hitherto the existence of such perfection. Free, as her husband, to enjoy the contemplation of her beauty, he felt himself dazzled and seized with vertigo, like a man who bends over an abyss or stares at the sun. He experienced a sort of delirium of possession, like the priest intoxicated by the god which fills him; all other

thoughts vanished from his soul, and the universe appeared to him only as a blurred mist wherein shone the brilliant figure of Nyssia. His happiness turned into ecstasy, his life into madness. At times his felicity terrified him. To be merely a wretched king, the distant descendant of a hero become a god by dint of labours, merely a common man, made of flesh and bones, and, without having done anything to deserve it, without even having, like his ancestor, killed the hydra or the lion, — to enjoy a happiness of which Zeus with the ambrosial hair would scarce be worthy, master of Olympus though he was! He felt in some sort ashamed to keep so rich a treasure to himself, to rob the world of such a marvel, to be the scaly, clawed dragon that guarded the living type of lovers', sculptors', and poets' ideals, all they had dreamed in their aspirations, their sorrows, their despair, — he, Candaules, the poor tyrant of Sardis, who had scarce a few miserable coffers filled with pearls, a few cisterns full of gold pieces, and thirty or forty thousand slaves, bought or taken in war!

His happiness was too great for him, and the strength which he no doubt would have found to bear up under misfortune failed him in felicity. His joy

overflowed his soul like water in a vase on the fire, and in the exasperation of his enthusiasm for Nyssia, he had come to the point of desiring that she were less timid and less modest, for it pained him to keep to himself the secret of such beauty.

"Oh!" he said to himself, during the deep reveries which filled up all the time which he did not spend near the queen, "what a strange fate is mine! I am wretched at what would make the happiness of any other husband. Nyssia refuses to leave the retreat of the harem, and, in her barbaric modesty, to raise her veil for any one but me. And yet with what intoxication of pride would my love see her radiant and sublime, standing at the top of the royal steps, dominating my prostrate people, and eclipsing like the dawn of day all the pale stars which, as long as night lasted, believed they were suns! You proud Lydians who believe yourselves beautiful, you owe it only to Nyssia's modesty that you do not appear, even to your lovers, as ugly as the oblique-eyed, thick-lipped slaves of Nahasi and Kush. If but once she were to traverse the streets of Sardis with uncovered face, in vain you would drag at the folds of your admirers' tunics; none of them would turn their heads, or if they did, they would ask

your name, so completely would they have forgotten you. They would cast themselves under the silver wheels of her car to enjoy the delight of being crushed by her, like the devotees of the Indus, who pave with their bodies the road traversed by their idol. And you, you goddesses whom Paris Alexander judged, if Nyssia had competed not one of you would have won the apple; not even Aphrodite, in spite of her cestus and her promise to make the shepherd beloved by the most beautiful woman in the world.

"To think that such beauty is not immortal, alas! and that the years will spoil those divine lines, that admirable hymn of form, that poem of which the strophes are contours and which no one on earth has read or is to read but myself! To be the sole depositary of such a treasure! If at least I could, with the help of lines and colours, and by the imitation of the play of light and shade, fix upon wood a reflection of her celestial face! If marble were not rebellious to my chisel, how I would carve out of the purest Parian or Pentelic stone a simulacrum of that lovely body that should make even the effigies of the goddesses fall from their altars! And long hereafter, when under the mud of floods, under the dust of van-

ished cities, men of future ages came upon some portion of that petrified image of Nyssia, they would say, 'Such were the women of that vanished world.' And they would raise a temple in which to place the divine fragment. But all I am capable of is stupid admiration, insensate love. Sole worshipper of an unknown divinity, I have no means of spreading her worship on the earth."

Thus in Candaules the artist's enthusiasm had killed the lover's jealousy, admiration was stronger than love. If instead of Nyssia, the daughter of the Satrap Megabasus, full of Eastern ideas, he had married a Greek girl of Athens or Corinth, no doubt he would have brought to his court the most skilful painters and sculptors and given them his queen as a model, as Alexander the Great did with Campaspe his favourite, who posed nude before Apelles. Such a fancy would not have been objected to by a woman coming from a land where the most chaste gloried in having contributed, one by her back, another by her bosom, to the perfection of some famous statue. But scarcely did shy Nyssia consent to throw off her veils in the discreet shadows of the bed-chamber; and the king's hot eagerness shocked her, if the truth be told,

more than it delighted her. The knowledge of the duty and submission which a woman owes her husband alone made her yield sometimes to what she called his caprices.

Often he prayed her to let fall upon her shoulders the waves of her hair, a golden river richer than Pactolus; to place upon her brow a wreath of ivy and lime like a Bacchante of Menalus; to lie down on a tiger-skin with silver teeth and ruby eyes, scarce covered with a cloud of tissue thinner than woven wind, or to stand within a pearly shell, dropping from her tresses a dew of pearls instead of sea water.

When he had found the most favourable position, he lost himself in mute contemplation, his hand tracing vague contours in the air, some sketch, some projected painting; and he would have remained thus for hours, had not Nyssia, soon weary of her part of model, recalled to him, in a cold and disdainful voice, that such amusements were unworthy of royal majesty, and contrary to the sacred laws of marriage. "It is thus," she would say, withdrawing, draped to the eyes, within the most secret recesses of her apartments, "that mistresses are treated, and not honest women of noble race."

These wise remonstrances had no effect upon Candaules, whose passion grew in inverse ratio to the coldness which the Queen exhibited towards him, and he reached the point of being unable to keep to himself the chaste secrets of his nuptial couch. He felt compelled to have a confidant like a prince in modern tragedy. He did not, as you may readily believe, choose a repellent philosopher with sour mien, whose long gray or white beard falls upon a cloak full of proud holes, nor a warrior who could talk only of ballistæ, catapults, and cars armed with scythes, nor a sententious Eupatrid full of counsel and political maxims; but he chose Gyges, whose renown as a lady-killer naturally gave him a reputation as a connoisseur in matters of women.

One evening he put his hand on Gyges' shoulder more familiarly and cordially than usual, and looking at him significantly, drew away from the group of courtiers, saying aloud, "Gyges, I want your opinion of my statue which the sculptors of Sicyon have just carved in the genealogical bas-relief on which are represented my ancestors."

"O King, your knowledge is greater than that of your humble subject, and I know not how to acknowl-

edge the honour you do me by deigning to consult me," replied Gyges, with a sign of assent.

Candaules and his favourite traversed a number of halls decorated in the Greek taste, in which the Corinthian acanthus and the Ionic volute bloomed and curled on the capitals of the columns, and the friezes were studded with figures in polychrome representing processions and sacrifices; they reached at last a remote part of the old palace, the walls of which were formed of irregularly shaped stones, laid dry after the cyclopean fashion. The proportions of this old architecture were as colossal as its character was formidable. The mighty genius of the old civilisations of the East was plainly imprinted upon it, and it recalled the Egyptian and Assyrian debauches of brick and granite. Something of the spirit of the old architects of the Tower of Lylacq survived in the squat pillars with deep, spiral flutings, the capitals of which were formed of four heads of bulls connected by knots of serpents that seemed to seek to devour them, — an obscure and cosmogonic emblem, the meaning of which was no longer intelligible, and which had gone down to the tomb with the hierophants of past ages. The doors were neither square nor round. They formed a sort

of ogee not unlike the mitre of the magi, and added by their quaintness to the characteristic appearance of the building.

This part of the palace formed a sort of court surrounded by a portico, the architrave of which was adorned with the genealogical bas-relief to which Candaules had alluded. In the centre was Hercules, the upper portion of his body bare, seated on a throne, his feet on a foot-stool, according to the rite for the representation of divine beings. His colossal proportions removed any possible doubt as to his apotheosis. The archaic rudeness and coarseness of the work, due to the chisel of some primitive artist, imparted to it an air of barbaric majesty and savage grandeur more in harmony perhaps with the character of the monster-slaying hero than the work of a sculptor deeply versed in his art.

On the right of the throne sat Alcæus, the son of the hero and of Omphale, Ninus, Belus, and Argon, the first kings of the dynasty of the Heraclids; then the whole series of intermediary kings, the last of whom were Ardys, Alyattes, Meles or Myrsus, the father of Candaules, and finally Candaules himself.

All these personages, with their hair plaited into cords, their curled beards, their oblique eyes, and their

angular attitudes, their awkward, constrained gestures, seemed to be endowed with a sort of fictitious life due to the rays of the setting sun and to the reddish colours which time imparts to marble in hot countries. The inscriptions in antique characters, engraved near each by way of legend, added yet more to the mysterious singularity of that long procession of figures in strange, barbaric accoutrements.

By a chance which Gyges could not help noticing, the statue of Candaules happened to occupy the last vacant place on the left of Hercules. The dynastic cycle was closed. To include the descendants of Candaules it would be necessary to erect a new portico, and to begin a new bas-relief.

Candaules, whose arm still rested on Gyges' shoulder, walked around the portico in silence. He seemed to hesitate about opening the conversation, and to have wholly forgotten the pretext under which he had brought his captain of the guards to this solitary place.

"What would you do, Gyges," at last said Candaules, breaking a silence that began to weigh on both, "if you were a diver, and from the green depths of the ocean you had brought up a perfect pearl, incom-

parable in brilliancy and purity, and more valuable than the richest treasures?"

"I should enclose it," replied Gyges, somewhat surprised at the abrupt question, "in a cedar box covered with plates of bronze, I should bury it in some desert place under a displaced rock, and from time to time, when I could be sure of not being seen by any one, I would go and contemplate my precious gem and admire the colours of heaven mingling with its pearly tints."

"And I," replied Candaules, his eye lighted up with enthusiasm, "if I possessed so rich a gem, I would set it within my diadem, show it freely to every eye, place it in the bright light of the sun, adorn myself with its brilliancy, smile with pride on hearing people say: 'Never did any king of Assyria or Babylon, never did any Greek or Trinacrian tyrant, possess a pearl of such perfection as Candaules, son of Myrsus, descendant of Hercules, King of Sardis and Lydia. Compared to Candaules, Midas, who changed whatever he touched into gold, was but a beggar poor as Irus!'"

Gyges listened in amazement to Candaules' speech, and sought to penetrate the hidden meaning of these lyrical divagations. The king appeared to be in a state

of extraordinary excitement; his eyes sparkled with enthusiasm, a feverish flush reddened his cheeks, his swollen nostrils drew in the air forcibly.

"Well, Gyges," continued Candaules, without appearing to notice his favourite's disturbed look. "I am that diver. In the sombre human ocean in which jostle confusedly so many misshapen and misbegotten beings, so many incomplete or degraded forms, so many types of bestial ugliness, wretched failures of nature in her attempts, I have found a pure, radiant, spotless beauty, without defect, the real ideal, the fulfilled dream, a form which never a painter or a sculptor could have reproduced on canvas or in marble. I have found Nyssia!"

"Although the Queen is endowed with the timid modesty of the women of the East, and no man save her husband ever beheld the features of her face, Fame with the hundred tongues and the hundred ears has published her praises everywhere," said Gyges, bowing respectfully.

"Mere vague, insignificant rumours. They say of her, as of all women who are not exactly ugly, that she is more beautiful than Aphrodite or Helen; but no one can imagine, even faintly, such perfection as hers. In

vain have I besought Nyssia to appear without her veil at some public festival or some sacrifice, or to show herself for a moment leaning on the royal terrace, to give to her people the mighty benefit of one of her aspects, to bestow upon them one of her profiles, more generous in this than the goddesses who exhibit to their worshippers only pale simulacra in alabaster or ivory. Never has she consented to do so. It is strange, and I blush to confess it, dear Gyges,—once I was jealous; I sought to conceal my loves from all eyes; no darkness was deep enough, no mystery impenetrable enough; but now I do not know myself, I do not feel like a lover or a husband. My love has melted into adoration like thin wax in a burning brazier. All my feelings of jealousy and possession have vanished. No, the most perfect work which heaven has bestowed on earth since the day when Prometheus applied fire to the left breast of the clay statue, cannot be thus concealed within the icy shadows of the harem. If I were to die, the secret of this beauty would remain forever buried under the sombre draperies of widowhood. I consider myself guilty when I conceal her, as if I had the sun within my palace and prevented its lighting the world. When I think of the harmonious lines, the

divine contours which I scarce dare touch with a timid kiss, I feel my heart near breaking; I long that a friendly eye should share my happiness, and, like the severe critic to whom a picture is exhibited, to have him acknowledge after attentive examination that it is irreproachable and that the possessor's enthusiasm is fully justified. Yes, many a time I have felt tempted to put away with a rash hand those detested veils; but Nyssia's fierce chastity would never forgive me. And yet I am unable to bear alone such great happiness; I must have a confidant of my ecstasy, an echo which shall answer my cries of admiration, — and that echo shall be you."

With these words Candaules abruptly disappeared into a secret passage. Gyges, left alone, could not help noting the course of events which seemed ever to put him on Nyssia's road. Chance had caused him to behold her beauty hidden from all eyes; of all princes and satraps, she had married Candaules, the very King whom he served; and by a strange caprice which he could not help considering almost fatal, that King had just made him, Gyges, confidences about the mysterious creature whom no one approached, and insisted upon completing the work of Boreas in the plains of

Bactria. Was not the finger of the gods visible in all these facts? Did not the spectre of beauty, whose veil was being dropped little by little, as if to inflame him, lead him unsuspectingly towards the fulfilment of some great destiny? These were the questions which Gyges asked himself; but unable to fathom the obscure future, he resolved to await events, and left the Court of Portraits, where the shadows were deepening in the corners and rendering more and more strange and threatening the effigies of Candaules' ancestors.

Was it a mere play of light, or an illusion produced by that vague uneasiness caused in the firmest hearts by the arrival of night in antique monuments? Gyges, as he was about to step over the threshold, thought that low moans issued from the stone lips on the bas-relief, and it seemed to him that Hercules was making mighty efforts to free his granite club.

III

The next day Candaules took Gyges apart to continue the conversation begun under the Portico of the Portraits. Freed from the difficulty of beginning the conversation, he opened himself unreservedly to his

confidant, and if Nyssia could have heard him, she might possibly have forgiven his conjugal indiscretions in consideration of the passionate praise which he bestowed upon her charms.

Gyges listened to these praises with the somewhat constrained look of a man who is not yet certain whether his interlocutor is not assuming greater enthusiasm than he really feels, in order to induce trustfulness slow to bestow itself. So Candaules said to him, with an accent of annoyance: —

"I see, Gyges, that you do not believe me. You think I boast, or that I have allowed myself to be fascinated like a coarse clown by some robust peasant girl on whose cheeks Hygeia has spread the crude colours of health. No, by all the gods! I have collected within my harem, like a living nosegay, the loveliest flowers of Asia and of Greece; since Dædalus, whose statues spoke and walked, I know everything which has been produced by sculptors and painters; Linus, Orpheus, Homer, have taught me harmony and rhythm. I do not look with the bandage of love over my eyes; I am judging coolly. The fire of youth has naught to do with my admiration, and were I as broken down, decrepit, and wrinkled as Tithonus, my action

would still be the same. But I forgive your incredulity and lack of enthusiasm. To understand me you must behold Nyssia in the radiant brilliancy of her sparkling whiteness, without any importunate shadow, without any jealous drapery, such as nature herself modelled her in a moment of inspiration that shall never again return. To-night I shall conceal you in one corner of our apartment. You shall see her."

"Sire! what are you asking of me?" answered the young warrior, with respectful firmness. "How, from the depths of the dust that I am, from the abyss of my nothingness, could I dare to gaze upon that sun of perfection, risking to be blinded for the rest of my life, or to see in darkness only a dazzling figure? Have pity upon your humble servant; do not compel me to an action so contrary to the maxims of virtue. Every man must look only upon what belongs to him. You know the immortal goddesses always punish imprudent or audacious men who surprise them in their divine nudity. I believe you; Nyssia is the loveliest of women; you are the happiest of husbands and of lovers; Hercules, your ancestor, in his numerous conquests, never found any one who approached your Queen. If you, the prince whom the most famous

artists take for judge and adviser,— if you think her incomparable, what matters the opinion of an obscure soldier like me? So give up your fancy, which I venture to say is unworthy of your royal majesty, and which you will regret as soon as you have satisfied it."

"Listen, Gyges," answered Candaules. "I see that you mistrust me. You think I seek to try you, but I swear by the ashes of the pile from which my ancestor rose a god, that I speak frankly and without any hidden thought."

"O Candaules, I do not mistrust your good faith; your passion is sincere; but perchance if I were to obey you, you would conceive for me deep aversion, you would hate me for not having resisted more, you would seek to take from my eyes, forced to be indiscreet, the image which you would have allowed them to catch a glimpse of in a moment of delirium. And who knows whether you would not condemn them to the eternal night of the tomb, to punish them for having opened when they ought to have been closed?"

"Fear nothing, I give you my royal word that nothing shall happen to you."

"Pardon your slave if I venture, after such assurance, to make another objection. Have you reflected

that what you propose to me is a profanation of the sacredness of marriage, a sort of visual adultery? Often woman puts aside modesty with her garment, and when she has been violated by a glance, without having ceased to be virtuous, she may well believe that she has lost something of her bloom of purity. You promise to feel no resentment towards me, but who shall secure me against the wrath of Nyssia, — so reserved, so chaste, of such delicate, savage virtue that she might be supposed yet a girl, ignorant of the laws of Hymen? Suppose she learns of the sacrilege of which I shall have been guilty through obedience to the will of the King himself. To what torture will she not doom me in expiation of such a crime? Who shall protect me against her avenging wrath?"

"I did not know that you were so wise and prudent," said Candaules, with a slightly ironical smile; "but all these dangers are imaginary. I shall conceal you in such fashion that Nyssia shall never be aware that she has been seen by any one else than her royal spouse."

Gyges, unable to object further, made a sign of assent to show that he yielded to the King's will. He had resisted as long as he could; his conscience

was henceforth at peace as regarded what might happen. He feared, besides, by further resistance to Candaules' wish to interfere with the fate which seemed determined to bring him near Nyssia for some formidable and all-important reason which he was not allowed to understand.

Without foreseeing what might be the end of it all, he vaguely saw pass before him innumerable, tumultuous, indistinct images. His hidden love, crouching at the foot of the staircase of his soul, had ascended a few steps, guided by the uncertain light of hope; the weight of impossibility no longer bore so heavily upon his breast now that he believed himself helped by the gods. For, indeed, who could have thought that the boasted charms of the daughter of Megabasus were to be no longer mysterious so far as Gyges was concerned?

"Come, Gyges," said Candaules, taking him by the hand; "let us turn this moment to account. Nyssia is now walking with her women in the gardens. Let us go and study the place and arrange our stratagem for to-night."

The King took his confidant by the hand, and guided him through the windings which led to the nuptial

apartment. The doors of the bedroom were formed of boards of cedar so closely joined that it was impossible to notice the divisions. By dint of rubbing them with wool steeped in oil, slaves had made the wood shine like marble. The bronze nails with faceted heads which studded them, shone like purest gold. A complicated system of straps and metal rings, of which Candaules and his queen knew the secret, formed the lock, for in those heroic days locksmithing was still in its infancy.

Candaules untied the knots, slid the rings on the straps, and raised with a handle, which he inserted into the mortice, the bar that closed the door; then, ordering Gyges to stand against the wall, he pushed back against him one leaf of the door so as to conceal him entirely. But the door did not fit so perfectly the frame of oak carefully polished and levelled by skilful workmen, but that the young warrior could, through the space left free for the play of the hinges, plainly perceive the whole interior of the room.

Opposite the door the royal bed stood upon a platform reached by several steps and covered with a purple carpet. Pillars of carved silver supported the entablature adorned with foliage in relief, amid which loves

played with dolphins. Thick curtains embroidered with gold surrounded it like the folds of a tent.

On the altar of the household gods were placed vases of precious metal, pateræ enamelled with flowers, two-handled cups, and all that was necessary for libations. Along the walls, lined with boards of cedar marvellously carved, were placed at intervals statues of black basalt in the constrained attitudes of Egyptian art, holding in their fists bronze torches in which were fixed pieces of resinous wood.

An onyx lamp, suspended by a silver chain, hung from that particular beam in the ceiling called "the black," because it was more exposed than the others to be soiled by smoke. Every night a slave had to fill this lamp with scented oil.

Near the head of the bed hung from a small column a trophy of weapons, consisting of a helmet with a vizor, a buckler lined with four thicknesses of bull-hide and covered with plates of tin and copper, a two-edged sword, and ash javelins with brazen heads.

From wooden pegs hung Candaules' tunics and mantles. They were simple and double, — that is, large enough to wrap twice around the body. Especially noticeable was a cloak thrice dyed in purple and

adorned with embroidery representing a hunt in which Laconian molossi pursued stags and tore them to pieces, and a tunic the stuff of which, as fine and delicate as the pellicle of an onion, was as brilliant as if it were woven of sunbeams. Opposite the trophy of arms was placed an arm-chair encrusted with ivory and silver, the seat covered with a leopard-skin spotted with more eyes than the body of Argus, and an open-worked foot-stool, on which Nyssia laid her garments.

"I usually retire first," said Candaules to Gyges, "and leave the door open as it is now. Nyssia, who has always some flower to finish on her tapestry, sometimes delays joining me, but at last she comes, and as if the effort cost a great deal, slowly and one by one lets fall upon the ivory arm-chair the draperies and the tunics which envelop her all day like the wrappings of a mummy. From the depths of your retreat you can follow her graceful movements, admire her unrivalled charms, and judge for yourself if Candaules is a young madman who boasts wrongly, or whether he does not really possess the richest pearl of beauty that ever adorned a diadem."

"O King, I should believe you even without this test," replied Gyges, leaving his hiding-place.

"Once she has thrown off her garments," replied Candaules, without paying attention to his confidant's words, "she comes and takes her place by my side. That is the moment you must seize upon to make your escape, for in walking from the arm-chair to the bed, she turns her back to the door. Step as if you were walking on the top of ripe grain; take care that not a grain of sand creaks under your sandals, hold in your breath, and withdraw as softly as possible. The vestibule is plunged in shadow, and the faint rays of the only lamp that remains lighted do not reach beyond the threshold of the room. It is certain, therefore, that Nyssia will be unable to see you, and to-morrow there will be some one in this world to understand my ecstasies and who will not be amazed at my mad admiration. — But the day is drawing to a close; the sun will soon lead his coursers to drink in the Hesperian wave at the extremity of the world beyond the pillars erected by my ancestor. Get back into your hiding-place, Gyges. Although the hours of waiting are long, I swear by Eros and his golden arrows that you will never regret them."

With this assurance Candaules left Gyges again concealed behind the door. The forced inactivity

of the King's young confidant gave free course to his thoughts. Certainly the situation was most strange. He loved Nyssia as one loves a star, without hope of his love being requited. Convinced of the uselessness of any attempt, he had made no effort to draw near her, and yet, by a concourse of extraordinary circumstances, he was about to be made acquainted with treasures reserved for lovers and husbands alone. Not a word, not a glance, had been exchanged between Nyssia and himself, for she was probably ignorant of the existence of him to whom her beauty would soon be no longer a mystery. To be unknown to her whose modesty would have nothing to sacrifice to him, was a strange position indeed. To love a woman secretly and to see himself led by the husband across the threshold of the nuptial chamber, to be guided towards the treasure by the very dragon that should have defended its approach, was not this enough to fill him with amazement and to make him admire the singular workings of chance?

At this point of his reflections he heard steps sounding on the pavement. It was the slaves coming to renew the oil of the lamp, to cast perfume upon the coals of the kamklins, and to shake the

fleeces, dyed purple and saffron, that formed the royal couch.

The hour was approaching, and Gyges felt the blood surging in his heart and veins. He even felt tempted to withdraw before the Queen's arrival, to tell Candaules afterwards that he had remained, and to indulge in the most excessive praise of Nyssia. It was repugnant to him, — for Gyges, in spite of his somewhat easy life, did not lack delicacy of sentiment, — it was repugnant to him to steal a favour for which he would willingly have given his life had it been granted freely. The husband's complicity made the deed more odious in some sort, and he would have preferred to owe to any other circumstance, the happiness of seeing the Marvel of Asia in her night-dress. Perhaps also — I must confess it as a truthful historian — the approach of danger had something to do with his virtuous scruples. Undoubtedly Gyges did not lack courage. Standing on his war chariot, his quiver rattling on his shoulder, his bow in his hand, he would have defied the proudest warriors; out hunting he would have attacked without trembling the boar of Calydon or the Nemæan lion; but — let who will explain the riddle — he shuddered at the thought of gazing upon a beautiful woman

through the chink of a door. No one possesses every sort of courage. Then he also felt that he would not see Nyssia with impunity. This was about to be the decisive moment in his life. He had lost the repose of his heart because he had seen Nyssia for one moment. What would it be after what was about to happen? Would life be possible for him when to that divine face, which already inflamed his dreams, should be added a lovely body made for the kisses of the immortals? What would become of him if henceforth he could not contain his passion in shadow and silence as he had done hitherto? Would he give to the court of Lydia the ridiculous spectacle of an insensate love, or would he try to draw upon him, by his extravagance, the disdainful pity of the Queen? This was not unlikely, since the reason of Candaules, the legitimate possessor of Nyssia, had been unable to resist the vertigo caused by that superhuman beauty, — Candaules, the young and careless King, who up to that day had laughed at love and preferred pictures and statues to everything else.

His reasoning was very sound, but very useless, however. At that very moment Candaules entered the room and whispered in a low but very distinct

voice, as he passed near the door, " Patience, my poor Gyges; Nyssia will soon come."

When he saw that he could not draw back, Gyges, who after all was a young man, forgot all in the happiness of feeding his eyes upon the exquisite spectacle which Candaules was about to give him. A young fellow of twenty-five cannot be expected to possess the austerity of a philosopher grown gray with age.

At last the soft rustle of stuffs trailing over the marble, easily discerned in the deep silence of night, announced the queen's coming. It was she. With a step as cadenced and rhythmical as an ode, she crossed the threshold of the bed-chamber, and the wind made by the floating folds of her veil almost touched the burning face of Gyges, who nearly fainted, and was obliged to lean against the wall, so great was his emotion. He recovered, and approaching the crack of the door, he assumed the most favourable position in order to lose nothing of the scene of which he was to be the invisible witness.

Nyssia walked towards the ivory footstool and began to take out the pins ending in hollowed balls, which fastened her veil to her head; and Gyges, from the shadowy corner where he was concealed, was able to

examine freely the proud and lovely face, of which he had had but a glimpse; the round, delicate, yet strong neck on which Aphrodite had traced with the nail of her little finger the three soft rays which are even now called Venus's necklace; the back of the neck on which little playful, rebellious curls twisted and turned; the silvery shoulders which half emerged from the chlamyd like the disc of the moon showing from behind a dark cloud. Candaules, leaning on his elbow, watched his wife with an air of affected carelessness and said to himself, "Now Gyges, who seems so cold, so difficult to please, and so disdainful, must be half convinced."

Opening a coffer placed on the table supported by lion's claws, the queen freed her beautiful arms, — which rivalled in whiteness those of Hera, sister and wife of Zeus, king of Olympus, — of the weight of the bracelets and chains of gems with which they were overladen. However precious these gems might be, they certainly did not equal the beauty of what they covered, and had Nyssia been a coquette, it might have been supposed that she put them on in order to be begged to take them off. The bracelets and the chasings had left upon her fine skin, tender as the inner

surface of the lily, light, rosy prints, which she soon caused to disappear by rubbing them with the slender, rounded, delicate fingers of her small hand.

Then, with a gesture like a dove that fluffs out its snowy feathers, she shook out her hair, which, no longer held by the pins, rolled in soft curls down her back and her bosom like the flowers of the hyacinth. She stood still for a few moments before drawing together the scattered tresses, which she then bound in one mass. It was marvellous to behold the fair curls streaming like golden jets between her silvery fingers, and her arms undulating like swans' necks above her head to roll and fix the tress. If perchance you have ever glanced at one of those lovely Etruscan vases with black backgrounds adorned with one of those subjects designated "Greek toilette," you may have an idea of Nyssia's grace in that attitude which from the days of antiquity to our own times has furnished painters and sculptors with so many charming motives.

Having dressed her hair, she sat down upon the ivory stool and began to untie the bands that held her cothurns. We moderns, thanks to our horrible system of shoes, almost as absurd as the Chinese, have lost the conception of what a foot really should be. Nys-

sia's was wondrously perfect, even in Greece and ancient Asia. The great toe, slightly separate like a bird's, the other toes somewhat long and arranged with charming symmetry, the shapely nails shining like agates, the clean, well-turned ankles, the rosy heel, — nothing was wanting to it. The leg which rose above the foot, and seemed in the light of the lamp to shine like polished marble, was irreproachable in form and outline.

Gyges, absorbed in his contemplation, said to himself, although he understood Candaules' madness, that if the gods had granted him such a treasure, he would have known well how to keep it for himself alone.

"Well, Nyssia, are you not coming to sleep by my side?" said Candaules, seeing that the Queen was not making haste, and desiring to abridge Gyges' period of waiting.

"Yes, my lord, I shall be done presently," replied Nyssia, and she unhooked the clasp which fastened her peplum upon her shoulder. She had now nothing but her tunic to throw off.

Gyges, behind the door, felt the blood throbbing in his temples. His heart beat so loud that he was sure that it must be heard in the room, and to still its pul-

sations he pressed his hand to his breast. When Nyssia, with a motion of graceful negligence, undid the girdle of her tunic, he felt his knees sink beneath him.

Was it through some instinctive presentiment, or was Nyssia's skin, untouched by profane glances, endowed with such lively magnetic susceptibility that it could feel the glance of an impassioned though invisible eye? However it may be, she yet hesitated to take off her tunic, the last rampart of her modesty. Twice or thrice her bare shoulders, her breast, and her arms shivered nervously as if they were touched by the wing of a night moth, or as if some insolent lip had dared to approach them in the shadow.

At last, apparently making up her mind, she threw off the tunic, and the white poem of her divine body appeared suddenly in its splendour like the statue of a goddess stripped of its veils on the day of the inauguration of a temple. The light shimmered with pleasure over her exquisite form and enveloped it in a timid kiss, profiting by an occasion, alas! very rare. The rays scattered through the room, disdaining to illumine the golden urns and jewelled clasps and the brazen tripods, concentrated upon Nyssia, leaving everything

else in darkness. If I were a Greek of the time of Pericles, I might praise at length her lovely, undulating lines, her elegant contours, her polished hips, her breasts which might have served as models for Hebe's cup; but modern prudery forbids such descriptions, for the pen is not permitted what is allowed to the chisel; and besides, there are things which can be written in marble only.

King Candaules smiled with an air of proud satisfaction. With swift step, as if ashamed of being so beautiful, being but the daughter of a man and a woman, Nyssia drew towards the bed, her arms crossed on her breast; but by a sudden motion she turned around before she took her place on the couch by the side of her royal husband, and she saw through the crack of the door a burning glance blazing like the carbuncles of Oriental legends; for if it were not true that she had double pupils and possessed the stone found in the heads of dragons, it was true that her green glance saw in darkness like the glance of the cat and the tiger.

A cry like that of a doe shot by an arrow at the moment when she dreams peacefully under the foliage nearly escaped her, yet she managed to contain herself,

and lay down by Candaules, cold as a serpent, with the pallor of death on her cheeks. Not a muscle moved, not a fibre stirred, and soon her slow regular breathing justified the belief that Morpheus had poured the juice of his poppies upon her eyelids.

She had divined everything.

IV

Gyges, trembling and nearly out of his mind, had withdrawn, obeying carefully the directions given him by Candaules, and if Nyssia by a fatal chance had not turned her head as she set foot on the bed and seen him flee, no doubt she would have remained forever ignorant of the outrage done to her charms by a husband more passionate than scrupulous.

The young soldier, who was well used to the windings of the palace, had no difficulty in finding his way out. He traversed the city with disordered steps, like a madman escaped from Anticyrus, and having made himself known to the sentry on watch near the ramparts had the gates opened and went out into the country. His head was burning; his cheeks flamed as if with fever; through his dry lips his breath came short and quick. He lay down in search of coolness

upon the grass wet with the dew of night, and having heard in the darkness through the thick grass and the watercress the silver breathing of a naiad, he dragged himself towards the spring, plunged his hands and arms in the crystal basin, bathed his face in it, and drank some water to calm the ardour by which he was devoured. Any one who had seen him thus in the faint light, bending desperately over the spring, would have mistaken him for Narcissus pursuing his own image; but certainly it was not with himself that Gyges was in love.

The brief apparition of Nyssia had dazzled his eyes like the glare of lightning. He saw her floating before him in a luminous whirl, and he knew that never again would he be able to drive that image from his memory. His love had grown suddenly; it had bloomed like plants which burst into bloom with a thunderclap. Henceforth it was impossible for him to master his passion. It would have been as easy to advise the purple waves which Poseidon raises with his trident to remain at peace on their sandy beds and not to break in foam against the rocks of the shore. Gyges was no longer master of himself, and he felt the gloomy despair of a man who, riding on a car, sees his mad-

dened horses, careless of the bit, flying in a wild gallop towards a rocky precipice. Innumerable projects, each more extravagant than the others, passed confusedly through his brain. He accused fate, he cursed his mother for having given him birth, and the gods for not having put him on a throne, for then he might have married the satrap's daughter.

A hideous grief gnawed at his heart. He was jealous of the King. From the moment when the tunic, like a flight of white doves settling on the sward, had fallen at Nyssia's feet, it had seemed to him that she belonged to him, and he considered that Candaules had robbed him of what was his own. In his amorous reveries, he had not thought of the husband; he had thought of the Queen as of a mere abstraction, without thinking clearly of all the intimate details of conjugal familiarity, so bitter and so keen to those in love with a woman who belongs to another. Now he had seen Nyssia's fair head bending like a flower by Candaules' brown head, and the remembrance wrought his anger up to the highest pitch, — though a moment's reflection should have convinced him that matters could not have been otherwise, — and he felt springing up in his soul a most unjust hatred of his master. The act of

compelling him to be present while the Queen undressed struck him as blood-thirsty irony, as an odious refinement of cruelty, for he forgot that his love for the Queen could not possibly be known to the King, who had sought in him merely a confidant of easy morals who was a connoisseur of beauty. What he should have looked upon as a wondrous favour, appeared to him a mortal insult which he thirsted to avenge. As he reflected that on the morrow the scene of which he had just been the invisible and mute witness would unquestionably be renewed, his tongue clove to his mouth, his brow was beaded with cold sweat, and his hands sought convulsively the handle of his broad, double-edged sword.

However, thanks to the coolness of night, that wise counsellor, he became somewhat calmer and returned to Sardis before day had dawned sufficiently to allow the few matutinal inhabitants and the early rising slaves to mark the pallor of his brow and the disorder of his garments. He went to the post which he usually occupied at the palace, expecting that Candaules would send for him ere long; for whatever the feelings that agitated him, he was not powerful enough to brave the King's anger and avoid the part of confi-

dant, which now inspired him with disgust only. Arrived at the palace he sat down on the steps of a vestibule wainscotted with cypress, leaned against a pillar, and, under pretext of being tired, threw his mantle over his head and pretended to sleep in order to avoid the questions of the guards.

If the night had been dreadful for Gyges, it had been no less so to Nyssia, for she did not doubt for a moment that Gyges had been concealed there by Candaules himself. The persistent manner in which the king had begged her not to veil so closely a face made by the gods to be admired of men; the annoyance he had felt at her refusal to appear dressed in Greek fashion at sacrifices and public solemnities; the sarcasms which he had not spared her concerning what he called her barbaric shyness, — everything proved to her that the young Heraclid, contemptuous of modesty, like an Athenian or a Corinthian sculptor, had willed to admit some one to mysteries which all ought to ignore; for no one would have been bold enough, unless commanded by him, to adventure upon such an enterprise, in which discovery meant instant death.

Slowly passed the sombre hours! With intense anxiety she waited until morning mingled its bluish

tints with the yellow gleams of the dying lamp. It seemed to her that Apollo was never again going to ascend his car, and that an invisible hand held back the sand in the hourglass. The night, which was as short as any other, seemed to her six months long, like Cimmerian nights.

As long as it lasted, she kept motionless and straight on the edge of her couch lest she should be touched by Candaules. If until now she had not felt any very great love for the son of Myrsus, she at least had for him that serious and serene tenderness which every honest woman bears to her husband, although the Greek liberty of his manners frequently displeased her, and he entertained about womanly modesty ideas entirely contrary to her own; but after such an affront, she felt for him cold hatred and icy contempt only. She would have preferred death to one of his kisses. Such an outrage, — for it is among barbarians, and especially among the Persians and Bactrians, the greatest dishonour to be seen nude, not only for a woman, but also for a man, — such an outrage was unpardonable.

At last Candaules arose, and Nyssia waked from her simulated sleep and hastened from the room, now profaned in her eyes as if it had been used for the noc-

turnal orgies of Bacchantes and courtesans. She longed to breathe purer air, and in order to give herself up freely to her grief, she hastened to take refuge in the upper apartments reserved for women, called her slaves by clapping her hands, and made them pour upon her arms, her shoulders, her breast, and her whole body ewers full of water, as if by means of this species of lustral ablution she hoped to efface the stain due to the glances of Gyges. She wished she could have torn away the skin on which the rays of his burning eyes seemed to her to have left traces. Taking from the hands of the servants the soft cloths used to dry the last drops of water, she rubbed herself with so much vigour that a faint, rosy flush showed on the places she had rubbed.

"In vain," she said to herself as she let fall the damp tissues and dismissed her maids, "in vain shall I pour over my body the waters of springs and rivers. The salt immensity of the ocean itself could not purify me. Such a stain can be washed out with blood only. Oh, that glance! that glance! It clings to me, enfolds, envelops, and burns me like the poisoned robe of Nessus; I feel it under my vestments like a flaming tissue which nothing can detach from my body. In

vain now I may heap robe on robe, choose the most opaque stuffs, the thickest mantles, I shall none the less bear upon my nude flesh that infamous robe formed of an adulterous and shameless glance. In vain have I been brought up from my birth in retreat, enwrapped like Isis, the Egyptian goddess, in a veil which no one could have lifted without paying with his life for such audacity; in vain have I lived apart from any profane eyes, unknown to men, virgin like the snow on which the eagle itself has not pressed its talons, so high does the mountain which it covers raise its head in the cold, icy air. The depraved caprice of a Lydian Greek has sufficed to make me lose in a moment, without my being guilty, the fruits of long years of precaution and reserve. Innocent and dishonoured! Concealed from all and yet publicly exposed! That is the fate to which Candaules has condemned me. How do I know that Gyges at this very moment is not occupied in describing my charms to the soldiers on the threshold of the palace? Oh, shame! oh, infamy! Two men have seen me and yet enjoy at the same time the sweet light of the sun! Wherein does Nyssia now differ from the most shameless hetaira, from the vilest of courtesans? My body,

which I had sought to make worthy of being the dwelling of a pure and noble soul, is now the subject of common talk; it is discussed like some lascivious idol brought from Sicyon or Corinth. It is approved or criticised: 'That shoulder is perfect; the arm is lovely, a shade too thin, perhaps' — how can I tell? All the blood rises from my heart to my face at the thought. Oh, beauty, fatal gift of the gods! Why am I not the wife of some poor mountain goatherd of simple, artless manners? He would not have placed on the threshold of his hut another goatherd to profane his humble happiness! My wasted form, my unkempt hair, my sunburned complexion, would have protected me from such coarse insult, and my honest plainness would have had no cause to blush. How dare I, after what has happened last night, pass by these men, upright and proud under the folds of the tunic which conceals nothing from the one or the other? I should fall dead with shame upon the floor. Candaules! Candaules! I had a right to more respect from you, and nothing I have done justifies such an outrage. Am I one of those wives whose arms wind like ivy around the husband's neck, and who more resemble slaves purchased for money for the pleasure

of their master than ingenuous women of noble race? Have I ever sung amorous hymns after the meal, accompanying myself on the lyre, my lips wet with wine, my shoulders bare, my head crowned with roses? Have I ever given you cause, by any immodest action, to treat me as a mistress who is exhibited at the end of a feast to one's companions in debauchery?"

While Nyssia thus grovelled in her grief, great tears flowed from her eyes, like rain-drops from the azure calyx of a lotus after the storm, and after rolling down her pale cheeks, they fell upon her beautiful hands, languidly opened like roses with half their petals gone, for no order from the brain desired them to act. Niobe, seeing her fourteen children fallen under the arrows of Apollo and Diana, was not more despairing and sad. But soon, recovering from this state of depression, Nyssia rolled on the floor, tore her garments, cast ashes upon her beautiful lustrous hair, rended her breasts with her nails, uttered convulsive sobs, and gave herself up to all the excess of Oriental grief, with the greater violence that she had been compelled to contain so long indignation, shame, the feeling of wounded dignity, and all the emotions that agitated her soul; for her pride in life had been broken, and

the idea that she was irreproachable in no wise consoled her. As the poet says, "The innocent alone knows remorse." She repented of the crime committed by another.

Nevertheless, she made an effort to master herself; she ordered to be brought the baskets filled with wools of different colours, the spindles covered with flax, and distributed work to her women as she was accustomed to do; but it seemed to her that the slaves looked at her meaningly, that they had not the same fearful respect for her as formerly; her voice did not sound with the same assurance, her gait had something humble and furtive about it. Inwardly she felt herself fallen.

No doubt her scruples were exaggerated and her virtue had been in no wise diminished by the mad act of Candaules; but ideas inbred from childhood possess irresistible power, and the modesty of the body is carried by Oriental nations to an excess almost incomprehensible to the peoples of the West. When a man desired to speak to Nyssia in Bactriana, in the palace of Megabasus, he had to do so with his eyes fixed on the ground; and two eunuchs, poniard in hand, stood by his side ready to plunge their weapons in his heart if he were bold enough to raise his head and gaze upon the

princess, although her face was covered. It can easily be imagined, then, what a mortal insult must have been, to a woman thus brought up, the deed of Candaules, which, no doubt, would have been looked upon by any other as merely an improper liberty. So the idea of vengeance had immediately arisen in Nyssia's mind, and had obtained enough power over her to stifle, before it escaped her, the cry of offended modesty when, on turning her head, she had seen the burning glance of Gyges flaming in the darkness. She had displayed the courage of the warrior in ambush who, struck by a chance arrow, dares not utter a groan for fear of betraying himself behind his shelter of foliage or reeds, but silently lets his blood streak his flesh with long, red streams. If she had not repressed that first exclamation, Candaules, forewarned and alarmed, would have been on his guard and would have made more difficult, if not impossible, the carrying out of her purpose.

She had yet no well-defined plan. She was, however, resolved to make him pay dearly for the insult to her honour. She had at first thought of slaying Candaules herself during his sleep with the sword suspended by the bed, but she revolted at the thought of

imbruing her lovely hands in blood. She feared lest she might not strike a deadly blow, and angry though she was, she hesitated at a deed so extreme and so little in accordance with her womanliness.

Suddenly she appeared to have come to a decision. She sent for Statira, one of the maids she had brought from Bactra, and in whom she placed great trust. She spoke to her for a few moments in a low voice and close to her ear, although there was no one in the room, as if she were afraid of being overheard by the walls. Statira bowed deeply and at once went out.

Like all people threatened by a great peril, Candaules felt perfectly secure. He was certain that Gyges had got out without being noticed, and he thought only of the delight of discussing with him the unrivalled charms of his wife.

So he sent for him and took him into the Court of Hercules.

"Well, Gyges," said he, with a smiling look, "I did not deceive you when I told you that you would not regret having spent a few hours behind that blessed door. Was I right? Do you know of any woman as beautiful as the Queen? If you do know any one more beautiful than she, tell me so frankly, and bear

to her from me this string of pearls, the emblem of power."

"My lord," answered Gyges, in a voice trembling with emotion, "no human creature is worthy of being compared with Nyssia. It is not the queenly string of pearls which ought to adorn her brow, but the starry crown of the immortals."

"I was sure that your coldness would melt in the blaze of that sun. Now you understand my passion, my delirium, my insensate desires. Am I not right, Gyges, when I say that a man's heart is not great enough to contain such love? It must overflow and spread out."

A deep blush covered the face of Gyges, who now understood too well the admiration of Candaules.

The king perceived it and said, half smilingly, half severely, "My poor friend, do not be mad enough to fall in love with Nyssia. You would lose your pains; it was a statue I showed you, not a woman. I allowed you to read a few of the stanzas of a beautiful poem, of which I alone possess the manuscript. I wanted to have your opinion of it, — that is all."

"You need not, sire, recall my nothingness to me. Sometimes the humblest of slaves is visited in his

dreams by a radiant and graceful apparition. That ideal form, that pearly skin, that ambrosial hair I dreamed of with my eyes open. You are the god who sent me the dream."

"Now," went on the king, "I need not tell you to be absolutely silent. If you do not seal your lips, you run the risk of learning to your cost that Nyssia is not as kind as she is beautiful."

The king waved an adieu to his confidant and withdrew to inspect an antique bed carved by Ikmalius, a famous workman, which he was asked to purchase.

Candaules had scarcely gone, when a woman, wrapped up in a long mantle so as to show only one of her eyes, after the manner of the barbarians, emerged from the shadow of the pillars behind which she had remained hidden during the conversation of the king and his favourite, walked straight to Gyges, touched him with a finger on his shoulder, and signed to him to follow her.

V

STATIRA, followed by Gyges, came to a small door, of which she raised the latch by pulling a silver ring attached to a leather strap, and ascended a steep stair-

case cut in the thickness of the wall. At the top of the stair was a second door, which she opened by means of an ivory and copper key. As soon as Gyges entered, she disappeared without explaining to him what he was expected to do.

Gyges felt curiosity, mingled with uneasiness. He did not quite understand the meaning of this mysterious message. He had fancied he recognised in the silent Iris one of Nyssia's women, and the way they had taken led to the women's apartments. He asked himself in terror if he had been perceived in his hiding-place, or whether Candaules had betrayed him. Either supposition was probable.

At the thought that Nyssia knew all, he turned hot and cold alternately. He tried to escape, but the door had been locked by Statira and his retreat was cut off. He therefore advanced into the room darkened by thick purple hangings, and found himself face to face with Nyssia. She looked like a statue coming towards him, so pale was she. The blood had left her face, a faint rosy tint showed on her lips alone; on her soft temples a few imperceptible veins formed a network of azure; tears had darkened her eyes and traced shining marks upon the bloom of her cheeks; the chrysoprase

colour of the eyes had lost its intensity. She was even more beautiful and more touching thus; grief had given a soul to her marmorean beauty.

Her dress, in disorder, scarcely fastened on the shoulder, allowed her bare arms, her bosom, and the upper part of her breasts to show in their dead whiteness. Like a warrior defeated in a combat, her modesty had surrendered. Of what use now the draperies which concealed her form, or the tunics with carefully closed folds? Did not Gyges know her? Why should she defend what was lost beforehand?

She walked straight to Gyges, and fixing upon him an imperial glance full of fire and command, she said to him, in a short, sharp voice: —

"Do not lie, do not seek vain subterfuges. Have at least the dignity and the courage of your crime. I know all, I saw you; — not a word of excuse, I shall not listen to it! Candaules himself concealed you behind the door; was it not thus it happened? And no doubt you think that that is the end of it. Unfortunately, I am not a Greek woman who yields easily to the whims of artists and voluptuaries. Nyssia shall serve as a plaything to no one. There now exist two men, one of whom has no right to be upon earth.

Unless he dies, I cannot live. It shall be you or Candaules. You may choose. Kill him, avenge me, and win by that murder both my hand and the throne of Lydia, or let swift death prevent you henceforth from seeing, by cowardly complaisance, what you have no right to behold. He who ordered is more guilty than he who merely obeyed; and besides, if you become my husband, no one shall have seen me who has not the right to do so. But make up your mind at once, for two of the four eyes in which my nudity has been reflected must have closed before night."

The strange alternative proposed with terrible coolness, with inflexible resolve, so greatly surprised Gyges, who had expected reproaches, threats, a violent scene, that he remained for a few moments pale and mute, as ghastly as a shade on the banks of the black river of Hell.

"*I* dip my hands in my master's blood! Is it you, O Queen, who ask me to commit so great a crime? I understand fully your indignation, I think it is justified, and it was not my fault that the sacrilege took place. But — you know it — kings are powerful, they belong to a divine race. Our fates rest in their august hands, and weak mortals may not hesitate to obey

their orders. Their will overcomes our refusals as torrents carry away dykes. By your feet I embrace, by your dress I touch as a suppliant, be clement! forgive an insult which is known to none, and which will remain forever buried in darkness and silence. Candaules cherishes, admires you, and his fault springs only from excess of love."

"Sooner could your speech move a granite sphinx in the barren sands of Egypt than me; winged words might issue from your mouth uninterruptedly for a whole olympiad without changing my resolution. A heart of brass dwells within my marble breast. Slay or die! When the sunbeam which is streaming through these curtains has reached the foot of this table, let your mind be made up. I wait." And Nyssia crossed her hands upon her bosom in an attitude full of sombre majesty.

Seen thus standing motionless and pale, with fixed eyes, contracted brows, wild-haired, her foot firmly pressed upon the pavement, she might have passed for Nemesis watching the moment to strike the guilty.

"No one willingly visits the darksome depths of Hades," replied Gyges. "It is sweet to enjoy the pure light of day, and the heroes themselves who

inhabit the Fortunate Isles would willingly return to their country. Every man instinctively seeks to preserve himself, and since blood must flow, let it be the blood of another rather than mine."

Besides these feelings, confessed by Gyges with antique frankness, he experienced others more noble, which he did not speak of. He was madly in love with Nyssia, therefore it was not the fear of death alone which made him accept the bloody task. The thought of leaving Candaules the free possessor of Nyssia was insupportable to him. And then, the vertigo of fatality was upon him. By a series of strange and terrible circumstances he was being carried on to the fulfilment of his dreams; the mighty tide bore him on in spite of himself. Nyssia in person was holding out her hand to help him ascend the steps of the royal throne. He forgot that Candaules was his master and his benefactor, for no man can escape his fate, and Necessity walks with nails in the one hand and whip in the other, to stay man or drive him on.

"It is well," answered Nyssia. "Here is the weapon," and she drew from her bosom a Bactrian poniard with jade handle adorned with circles of white

gold. "This blade is made, not of brass, but of iron hard to work, tempered in fire and water; Hephæstus himself could not forge a sharper. It will pierce like thinnest papyrus a metal cuirass or a buckler covered with dragon-skin. The time," she continued, with the same icy coldness, "shall be when he is asleep. Let him slumber and never wake again."

Her accomplice Gyges listened to her in a stupor, for he had not expected such resolution in a woman who could not bring herself to draw aside her veil.

"The place of ambush shall be the very spot where the infamous wretch concealed you to expose me to your glance. At the approach of night I shall push back the door upon you; I shall undress, lie down, and when he is asleep I shall sign to you. But do not hesitate, do not weaken, and let not your hand tremble when the time is come. And now, lest you should change your mind, I shall secure your person until the fatal moment. You might attempt to escape, to inform your master. Abandon all such hope."

Nyssia whistled in a peculiar way, and immediately, raising a Persian hanging enriched with a flower pattern, gave passage to four tawny monsters dressed in robes rayed with diagonal stripes, with muscular arms like

knotty oaks; big thick lips; golden rings passed in their nostrils; teeth sharp as wolves', and an expression of brutish servility hideous to behold.

The Queen spoke a few words in a tongue unknown to Gyges, — Bactrian, no doubt; the four slaves sprang upon the young man, seized him, and carried him away as a nurse carries away a child in her arms.

Now what was the real motive which induced Nyssia to act? Had she noticed Gyges when she met him near Bactra, and kept the remembrance of the young captain in one of those secret recesses of the heart in which the most honest women always have something hidden? Was the desire to avenge her modesty spurred on by some other unconfessed desire? If Gyges had not been the handsomest youth in Asia, would she have been as eager to punish Candaules for having outraged the sacredness of marriage? These are questions difficult to answer, especially three thousand years later, and although I have consulted Herodotus, Hephæstion, Plato, Dositheus, Archilochus of Paros, Hesychius of Miletus, Ptolemy, Euphorion, and all those who have spoken at length or shortly of Nyssia, Candaules, and Gyges, I have been unable to

reach any certain result. To ascertain after so many centuries, under the ruins of so many fallen empires, under the ashes of vanished nations, so slight a distinction, is difficult.

What is certain is that Nyssia's resolve was inflexible, the murder seemed to her the fulfilment of a sacred duty. Among barbaric nations any man who has surprised a woman nude is put to death. The Queen believed herself justified; only, as the insult had been secret, she did herself justice as best she could. The passive accomplice was to become the executioner of the other, and the punishment to spring from the crime itself; the hand was to chastise the head.

The olive-complexioned monsters shut Gyges up in an obscure part of the palace, whence it was impossible that he should escape and from which his cries could not be heard. He spent the rest of the day in cruel anxiety, accusing the hours of being lame, and again of passing too quickly. The crime he was about to commit, although in a way he was but the instrument and yielded to irresistible ascendency, presented itself to his mind under the darkest colours. Suppose the blow should fail through some circumstance which no man could foresee; or the people of Sardis were to

revolt and to seek to avenge the death of the King; — these were some of the very sensible but quite useless reflections which Gyges made while waiting to be brought out of his prison and led to the place whence he was to issue only to slay his master.

At last night spread its starry mantle over the heavens, and darkness fell upon the city and the palace. A light step was heard, a veiled woman entered the room, took Gyges by the hand, and led him through obscure corridors and the many windings of the royal edifice with as much certainty as if she had been preceded by a slave bearing lamps or torches. The hand which held that of Gyges was cold, soft, and small, but the slender fingers pressed his and hurt him as the fingers of a brazen statue made alive by a prodigy. Inflexible will was expressed by the ever-equal pressure, like that of a pair of pincers, which no hesitation of brain or heart caused to relax. Gyges, overcome, subjugated, bowed down, yielded to the imperious hand that drew him along as if he were dragged by the mighty arm of Fate.

Alas! this was not the way in which he would have loved to touch for the first time the beautiful royal hand which was holding out a dagger to him and

leading him to murder! For it was Nyssia herself who had come to seek Gyges to place him in his ambush.

Not a word passed between the sinister couple during the progress from the prison to the nuptial chamber. The Queen undid the straps, raised the bar of the door, and placed Gyges behind the leaf as Candaules had done the night before. The repetition of the same acts, with so different an intention, had a lugubrious and fatalistic character. Vengeance this time stepped upon the very prints of the insult; chastisement and crime travelled by the same road. Yesterday it had been the turn of Candaules; to-day it was that of Nyssia and Gyges; the accomplice of the insult was also the accomplice of the penalty. He had served the King to dishonour the Queen; he was to serve the Queen by slaying the King, exposed equally by the vice of the one and the virtue of the other.

The daughter of Megabasus appeared to feel a savage joy, a fierce pleasure, in employing only the means chosen by the Lydian King, and in turning to the account of murder the precautions he had taken for the satisfaction of a voluptuous fancy.

"You shall see me again to-night take off the garments which displease Candaules so much. The sight no doubt wearies you," said the Queen, with an accent of bitter irony, as she stood on the threshold of the chamber. "You will end by thinking me ugly," and sardonic, fierce laughter twisted for a moment her pale lips. Then, resuming her impassible and severe face: "Do not imagine that you can escape this time as you did before. You know my glance is piercing. At the least movement on your part, I shall awaken Candaules, and you understand it will not be easy to explain what you are doing in the King's apartment behind the door with a poniard in your hand. Besides, my Bactrian slaves, the copper-coloured mutes who shut you up, are guarding the issues of the palace and have orders to slay you if you go out. So let no vain scruples of faithfulness stay your hand. Remember that I shall make you King of Sardis, and that I — I shall love you if you avenge me. The blood of Candaules shall be your purple, and his death shall give you his place in his bed."

The slaves came, according to their custom, to renew the coals on the tripods, to fill up the lamps with oil, to spread upon the royal bed carpets and

skins of animals; and Nyssia hastened to enter the room as soon as she heard their steps sounding in the distance.

Soon after, Candaules arrived, quite joyous. He had purchased the bed carved by Ikmalius, and intended to substitute it for the Oriental couch, which, he said, he had never greatly cared for. He seemed satisfied to find Nyssia already in the chamber.

"So your embroidery frame, your spindles and needles have not had the same charms for you to-day as usually? I do not wonder at it. It is monotonous work to pass a thread continually between other threads, and I am surprised at the pleasure which you seem to take in it. The truth is, I was afraid that some day, seeing you so clever, Pallas Athena would angrily break her shuttle on your head, as she did to poor Arachne."

"My lord, I felt somewhat weary to-night, and I came down from the upper rooms earlier than usual. Will you not, before sleeping, drink a cup of the black Samian wine mingled with honey of Hymettus?" And as she spoke, she poured from a golden urn into a cup of the same metal the dark-coloured drink, in which she had mingled the sleep-compelling juices of the nepenthe.